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ABSTRACT

This four-document collection describes the implementation processes of dramatically improved literacy programs in elementary schools which are leading the move to restructure literacy education in the Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington). The first document in the collection, "Strategies for Improving School-Wide Literacy Programs: A Regional Depiction" (R. G. Jerry Schwab and others), is a depiction of the goals, innovations, implementation strategies, and barriers and facilitators of change in 41 elementary schools noted for their progress in literacy education. Following the depiction, the collection presents three case studies of individual schools' development of innovative teaching and social organization: "Adventures at Alki Elementary: A Case Study of School-Wide Literacy Change" (Sylvia Hart-Landsberg); "Transformation on the Tundra: A Case Study of School-Wide Literacy Change" (R. G. Jerry Schwab); and "West Orient's Dramatic Performance: A Case Study of School-Wide Literacy Change" (Sylvia Hart-Landsberg). Three figures presenting the characteristics of the K-5 early childhood model school, the recommended transition timeline, and West Orient's T-shirt design are included. Research methodologies for the depiction and case studies, and the Equity in Early Literacy Depiction Study interview questions and focus topics and protocols are attached. (RS)

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THE Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

PROGRAM REPORT

ED350596

IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE ELEMENTARY LITERACY PROGRAMS

R. G. (Jerry) Schwab
Sylvia Hart-Landsberg
Karen Reed Wikelund

July 1992

Equity in Early Literacy Project
Literacy, Language and Communications Program
Stephen Reder, Director

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101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

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Introducing a New Collection:

Implementing Innovative Elementary Literacy Programs

Strategies for Improving School-wide Literacy Programs:
A Regional Depiction

Adventures at Alki Elementary:
A Case Study of School-wide Literacy Change

Transformation on the Tundra:
A Case Study of School-wide Literacy Change

West Orient's Dramatic Performance:
A Case Study of School-wide Literacy Change

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Many people gave generously of their time and insight and contributed directly to the successful outcome of this depiction. First and foremost, we would like to thank the building administrators and teachers who shared their experiences and strategies with us. Only other educators can truly understand the significance of their willingness to sacrifice an hour or more out of their busy days for a telephone interview, often on short notice. Their creativity, perseverance, and dedication to their students is inspiring.

We benefited greatly from the advice and insight of Curriculum Directors and Specialists in districts and State Departments throughout the region. They provided not only a regional context for the innovations and strategies we learned about in individual schools, but also gave us many useful suggestions and contacts. Their enthusiasm for our project has been especially gratifying.

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We also wish to acknowledge the parents, board members, school support staff, district administrators, and other community members who offered their perspectives to us. And we particularly wish to thank the children for their hospitality and enthusiasm in the classroom.

The case studies grew out of the regional depiction of alternative implementation models and instructional approaches for early literacy development. In the course of that study we benefited greatly from the advice and insight of Curriculum Directors and Specialists in districts and State Departments throughout the region. They provided not only a regional context for the innovations and strategies we learned about in individual schools, but also gave us many useful suggestions and contacts, leading ultimately to these case studies.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Collection

Collection Overview

The purpose of this four-document collection is to describe the implementation processes of dramatically improved literacy programs in elementary schools which are leading the move to restructure literacy education in the Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington). These schools are noted for increasingly engaging their students in challenging, meaningful literacy activities. They have been successful in getting parents more involved in academic matters than ever before. Their teachers are confident that they are developing teaching philosophies and adopting instructional approaches which increase students' learning of basic skills along with ways to apply them in their present and future lives.

The first document of the collection is a depiction of the goals, innovations, implementation strategies, and barriers and facilitators of change in 41 elementary schools noted for their progress in literacy education. Following the depiction are case studies of individual schools' development of innovative teaching and social organization in the face of the challenge to create programs which allow all students to develop their literacy abilities. While the depiction offers information on a wide range of alternative teaching approaches and implementation strategies across the region, the case studies emphasize the ways sets of closely related innovations have been adapted to particular contexts. The three schools represent diverse social settings and faculty responses to the literacy challenge.

Alki Elementary has an ethnically diverse population drawn from several dispersed neighborhoods in Seattle, Washington. In a demoralized school climate of declining scores and resistance to change, its teachers, administrators and parents began to work together to bring about carefully planned literacy reform through scheduling more time for literacy activities and more integration across subjects.

Nome Elementary, a small town school on the Alaskan tundra, has a large population of native Yu'pik speakers. The staff and community there are taking exemplary steps to include both languages and multiple cultural practices in early literacy experience.

West Orient Elementary, in a tiny rural district outside Portland, Oregon, had a core of concerned parents who wanted something more than traditional reading and writing instruction for their children; a responsive district administration and school staff dug in to develop it. Their well-organized approach to gradual change has lead to a high degree of inclusion of special students in regular classrooms and sound progress toward developmentally appropriate education for all students.

The emphasis of each of these documents is the change process, but description of literacy program organization (schedules for classes, teacher assignments, student placement, assessment, and other aspects) and instructional practices (classroom teaching and special events) is included as essential for understanding the process.

The Practical Context of the Collection

A traditional hallmark of elementary education is school reading. Reading is viewed not only as a basic student outcome, but also as a prerequisite for academic learning in later years. Failure to progress according to grade-level norms often results in nonpromotion and permanent labeling and is highly predictive of subsequent poor performance in academic achievement, school completion and other indicators of school success. Children who do not acquire the expected literacy skills in the lower primary grades are widely viewed as being highly at risk.

Given the fundamental importance of literacy development for academic success, it is not surprising that there is intense ongoing discussion and debate among educators about the most effective instructional models and pedagogical techniques. The recurrence of these debates and the associated recycling of variant approaches is evident among elementary schools in the Northwest region.

Although there is a growing consensus in the educational research community about the need to restructure early literacy education, there are many barriers in our region (and across the country) to translating research into improved educational practices and outcomes. Most of the barriers reflect the massive penetration of what has come to be known as the "School Reading Machine." A whole industry--encompassing basal readers, standardized testing, elementary teacher preparation, school and district accountability, etc.--has grown up around relatively rigid, linear and monolithic reading pedagogies and assessment techniques. Despite growing interest in and experimentation with innovations such as whole language and intergenerational approaches, the entrenchment of the "School Reading Machine" poses a formidable and often harmful barrier to improving reading and writing instruction for many students, particularly those at risk of school failure.

In recent years a number of promising practices for the improvement of reading and writing programs have been identified. Enriched with insights from the fields of developmental psychology and early childhood education, many of these practices have emerged from home- and classroom-based studies of young children's literacy development which have shown that traditional reading pedagogy can be updated and restructured to serve students more effectively. With the growing concern about at-risk youth, it is exciting to note that many of these practices show promising results with children from poor and minority families.

From this growing body of theoretical research, several key principles critical to the provision of effective literacy instruction for all children have emerged:

- **Ground instruction in the child's perspective.** Children and adults have different, but equally valid, approaches to and understandings of learning to read and write.

- **Conduct literacy instruction in a richly interactional context.** Specific techniques and curricula may be less important in determining outcome than the quality of the interaction.

- **Promote learning through culturally and developmentally appropriate activities.** Effective instruction recognizes that development occurs in cultural contexts and in stages through which children pass at different rates.

- **Pay attention to both function and form.** It is necessary to focus on the ways we use reading and writing as well as appropriate form.

- **Model many genres of literacy.** Young children need to experience many types of written materials, including poetry, biography, fiction, documentary, scientific and quantitative literature.

- **Provide culturally diverse real-world situations for practicing reading and writing.** Meaningful instruction validates and extends children's out-of-school literacy experiences and facilitates application of school learning to everyday activities.

There is increasing recognition among practitioners that new approaches which reflect these principles (such as literature-based instruction, student-generated materials, whole language, integrated reading and writing) offer great promise for better serving all students because of their attention to meaning. However, there remain many practical issues to resolve in adapting and implementing them.

Introduction to the Case Studies

Research Context

The three case studies of this collection portray the ways elementary educators have dealt with implementing substantial literacy reorganization in particular school contexts. (The research methodology is described in Appendix D.)

Several facets of the material make it particularly useful to people interested in taking decisive action: First, the studies *document the change process*--establishment of goals, attempts to realize them, causes and consequences of certain decisions. Consolidating the history of a complex, collective endeavor enables us to communicate the participants' experiences so that others can learn from them. Second, the cases *represent an array of approaches* to changing literacy programs. This diversity demonstrates the feasibility of particular approaches to change and suggests the possibility of crafting other successful approaches. Third, these descriptions *show the power of context and interaction among literacy innovations* for influencing the meaning of each single innovation. Finally, the accounts *highlight the "human" details* of accomplishments which, according to many practitioners and clients, have succeeded. From these data, educators can see how the powerful stream of successful reform embodied "backward" eddies of dissension, frustration, and imperfect outcomes as well as "forward" currents of serendipity and inspiration.

The schools and the communities in these case studies are diverse and took widely differing approaches to implementing literacy innovations. Yet, underlying the diversity among their approaches to literacy instruction and implementation are strong common themes which our research throughout the Northwest (reported in the regional depiction) found to be repeated in many other schools:

- **The need for improvement was urgent.** Many people agreed that their school was failing in terms of student learning and appreciation for language arts, parent approval of and involvement in education, and teacher effectiveness and professionalism. A number were eager to participate in immediate action.

- **The process of change was difficult**. Within the schools, the culture of teaching, administrative obstacles, curricular challenges associated with the new approaches, and time limitations slowed down the process. Resistance from outside the schools took the form of resource limitations, geographical isolation from sources for staff development, and parent and community objections. In the cases studied here, success was attained due to a variety of factors which overcame these challenges.

- **Literacy reform was rewarding**. Staff and clients alike radiated pride in the results of their work to change themselves and their school. Moreover, they reported having enjoyed major components of the process. While they recognized the educational gains already made, they expected successful change in their schools to continue.

- **Traditional and innovative practices were melded in "workable" ways**. Time and again experienced people told us, in effect, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." They feared that a "backlash" against old-fashioned skills (e.g., phonics) could inhibit teachers' concern for teaching them in more effective ways.

- **The overall school literacy program and the teaching repertoires of individual teachers will never be finished**. The professionals we encountered are reaping every "lesson" they can from each action they take. These lessons then inform their practice. The cycle thus created continues to expand their understanding of children and children's interaction with the environment.

The fact that these themes emerge in many schools where people are seeking change suggests that general guidelines for implementing innovative literacy education can be formulated. The significance of the diversity of circumstances in which teachers are restructuring literacy education is not that there are no general guidelines but that the guidelines must be applied with careful attention to specific circumstances. In each school, staff used a set of implementation procedures and instructional approaches which "fit" their situation. These "fit" not because they simply "look better" than the old ones but because they have been tailored to each other and to the setting. The literacy programs which have resulted are appealing, useful "garments" because they were not the products of lone designers' spontaneous inspirations for extreme alterations. Rather, they were created by groups of tailors who collaborated to study, plan, and add small pieces to the program one at a time. In each case, the staff tailored the overall program "fit" in spite of disadvantages in their surroundings and difficulties with the "stuff" of the implementation models and instructional approaches themselves. Many of these disadvantages and difficulties remain. But that does not diminish the value of the program or these case studies, for in revealing the interplay between innovation and context they suggest ways staff in other schools can govern this interplay for the benefit of all their students. In the case studies of this series we pay close attention to the complex contexts, believing that from this holistic view readers can draw valuable insights for effecting change in their own settings.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL-WIDE LITERACY PROGRAMS: A REGIONAL DEPICTION

Overview of This Study

Literacy education in elementary schools in the Northwest is being revitalized. This report on effective strategies for early literacy instruction in the five states of this region--Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington--draws upon the expertise of administrators and teachers who have been identified by their peers as leaders, innovators and risk-takers in the domain of literacy education. Their successes in terms of student outcomes are becoming widely known and are inspiring new instructional practices in other schools in their areas.

This document portrays a range of strategies and approaches for improving school-wide literacy programs currently being implemented in the region. The information presented here was gathered primarily through in-depth telephone interviews with innovative educators intent on ensuring that all children learn to read and write fluently and with understanding. (The research methodology is described in Appendix A, the interview questions and focus topics in Appendices B and C, respectively.)

Although our goal is to portray a variety of alternative approaches and strategies, we have made no attempt to conduct an exhaustive survey of programs, approaches or strategies throughout the region. Nor do we propose that the instructional approaches and implementation strategies depicted are effortlessly transportable to other settings; on the contrary, our research has shown that successful approaches and strategies are shaped by the needs and opportunities in their local settings.

Nevertheless, we are convinced that literacy reform brings with it a cluster of common problems and that the experience of other practitioners can be a powerful resource for "newcomers" developing strategies to address those problems. From our conversations with many educators striving at many stages of developing literacy education, we have been led to expect that the information in this report will be a welcome support and encouragement for those who are treading on fresh turf in the area of elementary literacy education.

From the data collection process six key focus topics emerged which we use here to organize successful practitioners' experience into a useful resource. First, we identify the **goals** which underpinned the decisions to put nontraditional practices into place--what practitioners hope to achieve. Next, we briefly describe some of the **innovations** they have adopted to achieve those goals. We then focus on specific **implementation strategies**--how practitioners have sought to put various innovations into place. The emphasis is on those strategies employed at the *district and building levels*. We also discuss what practitioners have identified as **barriers to implementation** and **facilitating factors**. Finally, we examine **assessment and evaluation concerns and practices** as they relate to innovative early literacy instruction--specifically, how practitioners are determining whether or not their innovations are successful.

As is true of most systems of categorization, these focus topic categories sometimes overlap. Depending on the type and scope of the change a school or district is trying to implement as well as the stage in which the staff find themselves, the "innovation" of

one site may resemble one of several "implementation strategies" in another. We maintain the individual site's perspective as much as possible in the presentation of the data from these interviews.

Goals

Practitioners in the sites we contacted implemented innovative approaches with specific goals in mind. In every case, the interests of children in the classroom was the foremost consideration in setting goals. Some sites established single goals while others clustered goals or expressed a vision for the site. The range of goals can be summarized as follows:

- To raise the literacy skills and outcomes of all students
- To prepare all children--at any stage of development; of any cultural, socio-economic or linguistic background; with any skill level--to read and write fluently and with understanding
- To integrate the language arts with the wider curriculum
- To teach children in their own classrooms without subgrouping based on ability or "pulling out" special individuals
- To increase parent and community interest in and involvement with literacy

Innovations

Innovations are clustered below into groups of practices related to the goals in the preceding section. They involve teachers, children, parents, and community members in education which seeks to develop skills in richly interactional contexts, emphasizing not only the social interactions so necessary for literacy development but also the interaction between the reader/writer and text. In some areas, innovations are being implemented district-wide; in others, one teacher may be designing her own approach. It would not do justice to the numerous innovative practices identified during our interviews to attempt an exhaustive catalog of such practices here. Because the focus here is on implementation strategies, we provide brief examples of some of the most common types of innovations and move on to the ways educators are implementing them.

Integrating the Language Arts Curriculum: Reading, Writing, Viewing, Speaking, and Listening

One classroom teacher recruited a high school student for three days a week to work with children at literacy centers on auditory, visual, fine motor, speaking, and reading skills. Later in the year students had broader choices in centers for book making, listening, computer use, drama, and eight other activities.

Implementing a Literature-based Reading Program

Many of the teachers we interviewed are expanding their classroom reading material to include a wider variety of literature. They keep a classroom library and provide daily time for children to choose books to peruse or read on their own; often, children can check books out to take home. Many basal publishers are reacting to this trend by incorporating passages from diverse sources. Some teachers, schools and even districts are foregoing basals entirely to teach language arts through trade books.

Combining Traditional Materials with Whole Language, Literature, Basals, Phonics, and Spelling

Many schools purchase a basal series which they use alternately with other literature, e.g., multiple copies of novels for classes to read together, predictable (or patterned) stories, and large books for the whole class to view at once. Combinations include traditional phonics worksheets passed out regularly or offered as one choice at an optional literacy center. Rather than use prepared sheets, many teachers devise their own phonics and spelling lessons from the literature the class is reading.

New Uses of Materials and Equipment

Schools are increasing the range of literacy skills students acquire by using new basal series containing many genres of literature, programs comprised of hard copy and computer texts, interactive reading and writing software, student- and teacher-generated material, tapes of stories for children to listen to as they read along, and many more new forms of instructional materials. In addition, objects to manipulate (beads, scales, rocks, pets, etc.) which formerly were not considered literacy-related are now fundamental to literacy activities.

Retaining or Reintroducing Native Languages Using Whole Language Approaches

One approach for teaching students for whom English is not their native language is to introduce literacy in their native language first. This practice is in line with the principles of emerging literacy because it emphasizes literacy acquisition in the natural context of one's familiar environment. Thus a first grade room for Yu'pik speakers, for example, provides literacy centers with objects which are common in Yu'pik surroundings and books with passages about native animals and local customs.

Integrating Language Arts with Other Disciplines

The most common way to develop literacy abilities in tandem with knowledge in the content areas is the thematic approach to curriculum. Practitioners were very enthusiastic explaining the interrelationships among the subjects their themes embodied. One school piped in river water for raising salmon eggs and celebrated releasing the fish into the river; the "lessons" entailed in this work included science, math, social studies, cooperation, and more. One school proclaims a different continent to be the theme of each grade. By the end of elementary school an individual student has cultivated literacy and knowledge of every continent. Language-related skills also are integrated into a single subject along more traditional lines, as when a teacher presents

a unit on the solar system and structures opportunities for children to see and draw pictures, read and hear information about the planets.

Redesigning Instructional Group Placement

For pedagogical reasons, many educators with whom we spoke plan to eliminate homogeneous skill-level reading groups. This is based on their observations that the most effective way to promote literacy is in a pleasant, stimulating social setting and that the classroom teacher is best able to provide this. Heterogeneous grouping also avoids the stigma which can retard student progress. In line with this concept, many teachers read and write with the class as one group and have students work on literacy tasks individually or in small groups with changing membership. Yet they also attend to the special needs of their many at-risk students by means of temporary groupings, special assignments, and close monitoring. Additional rearrangements of students for work are peer-tutoring and decreased numbers of students in remedial programs.

Involving School, Parents, and Community

Most schools introducing the innovations described in this section arrange yearly school-wide celebrations of literacy to which they invite parents and the community as guests or contributors. The Authors' Tea is a popular form of celebration: Books written, illustrated, and bound by children are displayed. Other events include the Royal Readers (when well-known adults read their favorite literature to the school) and Bookbaggers (when parents spend the evening teaching mini-lessons in the gym and children stay for a sleep-over on the gym floor). Practitioners also described ongoing programs enlisting volunteers, usually to listen to individuals read. Single events occurred also. An irrigation expert took children on a tour of water facilities in the community and a local historian showed children significant neighborhood sites.

Implementation Strategies

Implementation is by far the most significant issue for practitioners in the region. Regardless of goal or innovation, realizing those goals and putting those innovations into place are complex challenges. Every implementation is context specific and shaped by a range of factors, some of which enable and facilitate particular strategies, and others which constrain or bar specific options. (The issues of barriers and facilitating factors are considered separately in later sections.) The implementation strategies fall into five general categories related to staff, materials and instruction, funding, relationships, and special needs. Each of these categories is described and analyzed in turn.

Staff

This category is diverse, comprised of all those implementation strategies cited by practitioners which pertain directly to staff placement, training, involvement, and the like. For analysis, we cluster strategies into four sets: staffing and scheduling, the structure of staff committee work, styles of leadership and staff involvement, and staff training.

Staffing and scheduling. Many sites employ creative strategies involving scheduling and staffing. In some settings, building administrators sought specific skill sets among newly hired teachers, while in others the need was for caring and committed volunteers. For many sites, creative scheduling provides opportunities for shared planning time among faculty, while careful assignment of Chapter I staff allows maximum benefit for special needs children. The following represent some of the range of strategies employed in the region:

- **Ensure faculty input in hiring:** Concerned that the gains that had been made in implementing an integrated reading and writing approach needed to be maintained, teachers asked and received permission from the local school board to be involved in the hiring of new staff. Similarly, teachers will play a role in the hiring of a new administrator in the event the current principal should leave.

- **Involve parents as volunteers:** Parent volunteers helped compile monthly reading progress reports for every child in the school.

- **Staff creatively:** A new computer lab dedicated to teaching first graders to read and write requires additional adults to monitor students and facilitate the learning process. An educational assistant was hired to run the lab and work with the classroom teachers as they brought their children to the lab each day. Through careful scheduling and because special needs students are not pulled out, it has been possible to have resource room and Chapter I teachers working with students in the lab at various times. In a second school Chapter I teachers work closely with classroom teachers and help students on other subjects as well as reading.

- **Arrange planning time:** Music, P.E., and library periods are frequently scheduled in ways that increase teachers' planning time. Many teachers think the ideal planning schedule is one which provides a common "prep" period for all teachers of one grade. But one staff that arranged such a schedule found a disadvantage--decreased coordination among grades. In a school where the faculty as a whole was not committed to literacy innovations, the whole language teachers spent one afternoon a week after school working together: "It comes out of our hide because we choose to do it," said one teacher.

- **Staff across grade levels:** While retaining grade level as the basis of classes and teacher teams, one building intends to use cross-level personnel to articulate planning. Such personnel (whether a curriculum coordinator, administrative intern, or doctoral student) will transcend grades and weave faculty ideas into cross-curricular projects. In a pilot project, faculty tied curriculum to a school-wide project in which children raised salmon from eggs and released them.

Staff committees and workgroups. Though often the bane of teachers' existence, committees and workgroups can be extremely effective vehicles for implementing change. With a shared vision and appropriate support, great gains are possible through such strategic groupings:

- **Form parent-teacher involvement groups:** A group of teachers took up the task of getting parents involved in their children's learning and

organized a range of special activities and events. In addition, the group worked to develop strategies to make their colleagues more comfortable inviting parents into the classroom.

- **Encourage purposeful program meetings:** To maintain their enthusiasm and to share ideas in an early childhood unit, teachers, tutors, and the Chapter I specialist for grades K-3 meet twice a month to make decisions and share insights. These meetings are often a means of "in-house" staff development as teachers take turns presenting new practices and strategies. Staff from the intermediate grades are encouraged to attend.

- **Link committee tasks:** While attempting to convert to a literature-focused, integrated language arts curriculum, one building linked the process to a project for writing lesson plans, developing integrated lesson plans which do not rely on textbooks or workbooks.

- **Structure committees carefully:** One successful school is participating in a formal school improvement project. As part of this project they chose a clear goal (in this case improvement in literacy instruction) and a leadership team. They found that the literacy changes required three more teams--instructional leadership, research and development, and community education. Because the committee work was so demanding, the principal became the chair of the leadership team, an unusual assignment because the school improvement program they are using promotes teacher responsibility.

Styles of leadership and staff involvement. Most of the strategies for putting the instructional innovations into place required various mixes of leadership and involvement.

- **Make a commitment to change:** Educators recognize the broad and long-lasting implications of the shift to an integrated whole language program. Before embarking on this change, several principals required teachers and convinced the school board to make a practical and philosophical commitment to it.

- **Make change a joint effort:** In one school district, the curriculum support personnel worked closely with local building staff to make change a joint effort; this contrasts with the traditional top-down model where the specialists insist on changes at the building level and leave the principal to find a way to convince or coerce teachers to implement them.

- **Start from the grassroots:** Perhaps more than any other strategy, grassroots change was cited as critical to the successful implementation of alternative approaches to early literacy. In several schools, teachers took the lead and pulled their building administrator and district curriculum coordinators through the process of change.

- **Find a powerful leader:** In several sites, change was only possible through the untiring efforts of a single person who led the way for other staff. In some places an administrator and a cadre of teachers shared a vision and were willing to take risks.

- **Foster gradual transition:** A careful and gradual transition is a key to success in the minds of many educators. In the words of one principal, "You have to play with the hand you are dealt." Traditional teachers may need to be allowed to change slowly. "You have to plant seeds rather than give teachers the answer in the first place. You may never reach your ideal, but getting half-way there is better than failing completely because you pushed too hard," said another principal. According to several teachers and administrators, change is more effective if phased in over time, e.g., by teaching teachers writing as a process first, then having them introduce literature related to a theme.

  As a starting point for converting his district to a literature-based reading program, a superintendent met with all building principals. The first step was to redefine failure for the year as failure to try the program. Fostering a gradual transition, the administration is coaching teachers through the process and giving them as much staff development as needed to make them comfortable. Teachers are allowed to hang onto a basal approach, but the explicit expectation is that all will try a couple of literature-based lessons during the year.

- **"Experiment" with change:** A common strategy for implementing change is a local and "unscientific" experiment in which a small number of classrooms implement varying degrees of whole language curriculum and share the results with the staff, school board, and community. A similar "experiment" is to focus the new approach on an individual or group of at-risk students and then show the remarkable growth.

- **Base change on available research:** Another set of strategies involves a careful structuring of building level research and decision making responsibilities. In one school the principal required each teacher to join a staff development team and report on various research and training activities, e.g., studying the content of upper level college courses, attending conferences and inservice trainings, and visit other schools.

- **Use existing cycles to drive change:** Several schools used the end of the textbook adoption cycle to reexamine their literacy instruction. The big question used to be which basal to choose (and one issue was whether the workbooks matched the basal), but increasingly schools are finding that selection committees need to attend workshops and conduct careful research to find appropriate materials for new instructional approaches. This task is made even more difficult now that so many publishers are calling various types of materials "whole language."

Staff training. There are countless strategies for traditional staff training and inservice, but innovative instructional strategies sometimes require innovative training strategies as well.

- **Share research:** In an attempt to lead her staff in the direction of an integrated language arts curriculum, one principal collected research literature on alternative approaches and put selected articles in their boxes for six months prior to implementing changes. This served the dual purpose of educating staff in the latest research and preparing them for the upcoming changes.

- **Draw on local expertise:** Training and inservice is expensive, especially for rural schools and small districts. One strategy, often overlooked, is to draw on the knowledge and expertise of local faculty for "in-house" inservice. In some sites these sessions are informal, in others "teacher leaders" are identified and asked to conduct workshops for other staff.

- **Provide inservice for classroom aides:** The fact that classroom aides often are critical to the success of instructional innovation sometimes is overlooked when resources are allocated for training and inservice. Some states and districts provide special inservice programs and institutes just for instructional aides.

- **Structure opportunities for faculty to assist one another:** Peer coaching and pairing of teachers for training and support are strategies which encourage teachers to help one another gain skills for implementing new approaches. In one school a principal helped a teacher who was unsure about making the transition to an integrated language arts approach by assigning to her an enthusiastic resource teacher who could answer her questions and give advice. In another school a principal employs a variation of the same strategy as she consciously pairs teachers for whole language training by assigning highly motivated teachers to "foot-draggers."

- **Look for training opportunities in unexpected places:** There were many creative strategies for securing inservice training. Several sites encourage their teachers to observe colleagues both in their own and other schools. This not only provides opportunities for teachers to get fresh ideas, but also encourages informal networking. One school offered its teachers a two-week, summer workshop on whole language, while 60 teachers in a small district received monthly inservice via teleconference. One principal found that sales representatives for the various publishers were an underused but valuable resource for staff training.

Materials and Instruction

The decision to implement an alternative instructional approach is related to decisions about curriculum and materials. In this section we discuss some strategies for implementing changes to curriculum as well as strategies for making the attendant choices regarding instructional materials and facilities.

Curriculum. Strategies of staff leadership and involvement discussed earlier are closely linked to strategies for developing or revising curriculum. In this section we look at some strategies for identifying directions and implementing change in curriculum.

- **Plan research:** In one site the language arts committee devised a year-long research plan to resolve issues and provide direction for curriculum changes for K-6. The plan involved three overlapping tasks--collect relevant student background data, develop a consistent instructional philosophy, and plan direction for student assessment.

- **Develop a common philosophy and process:** In order to develop clear and shared goals, one district created a curriculum committee (with representatives from each grade level and each school in the district) charged with defining a common philosophy, a specific sequence of reading behaviors, and appropriate assessment models. The work of the committee provided solid footing for change and a shared set of strategies for schools throughout the district. A key strategy was the development of a list of "nonnegotiables" that all teachers have to teach, no matter how they get there. This has been especially helpful in lowering tension among teachers who began with different philosophies.

- **Focus on individual learning styles:** Several sites based their curriculum implementation strategies on the assumptions that one approach will not meet the needs of all students and that a good curriculum will fit the needs of the child (not vice versa).

- **Introduce skills in the context of literature:** One teacher introduces skills in relation to real reading and writing activities which occur for purposes other than just learning technical skills.

- **Make transitions from basals:** Many practitioners described their strategies for making the transition out of basal readers and into literature-based or integrated curricula. Several teachers began doing literature-based lessons using the basal stories to offer choices to children, drawing themes from them and supplying additional literature-based readings. Even teachers who are required to use direct instruction phonics approaches have reported success with this approach.

Books and materials. In this section we focus on strategies for determining the kinds of instructional materials to use and how to use and customize them. Obviously these strategies are linked to prior decisions regarding changes in curriculum. For many educators, these choices begin with a decision to abandon or begin a transition away from basal readers; a similar pattern can be found for math where teachers are replacing traditional texts with math manipulatives.

- **Adapt materials:** Many of the individuals we spoke with insisted that whole language is a philosophy and not a curriculum. Consequently, they can adapt most types of instructional materials (except extremely short, abridged stories) for classroom use.

- **Use textbooks as transitional forms:** Faculty in one site decided to choose a textbook in the middle ground between skills-based and literature-based approaches. This choice provided the advantage of an easier transition: New or less confident teachers can have structure while experienced teachers can use the text as a stepping-off point to literature-based instruction. Although the building administrator in this site sees his role as assisting teachers to move away from the textbook, the textbook is there for the teachers who need it.

- **Combine various materials:** Other sites use a combination of materials. Various combinations of group books, big books, journals, songs and poems on charts, textbooks, literature, and basals are common.

- **"Write your own" textbooks:** In one small district, teachers were dissatisfied with available materials and set out to write their own integrated language arts curriculum. Working together, the 28 teachers are producing a literature-based, cross-curricular textbook.

- **Invest in literature:** In an effort to move to a literature-based program, one small district spent $100,000 on materials and staff inservice over one summer. In just the first year of implementation, the district purchased 20,000 paperbacks.

- **Customize existing materials for ESL:** Several sites are attempting to meet the needs of ESL children while instituting major changes to instructional practices in the classroom. In one school, where the language of the majority of children is not English, teachers have received permission from a publisher to paste words from the children's native language over English words in big books. In addition, teachers customize work in activity centers with both native and English words.

Facilities. Strategies to redesign, adapt, or use existing facilities in innovative ways have been tied to the implementation of innovative approaches to early reading and writing in many schools throughout the region.

- **Expand:** When the local school board undertook class size reduction in order to promote literacy, it was necessary to build modular rooms to house the increased number of classes.

- **Contract:** In a small multigrade school in a remote rural area, the decision was made to implement a whole language, literature-based program. A major obstacle, however, was that the school's original library had been distributed among the classrooms in order to provide a classroom for preschoolers. The teachers and principal decided to create a combined class of preschoolers and K-2 students so that the original library could be reconstituted and developed.

- **Expand and contract:** During remodeling, one school installed movable walls between classrooms to facilitate cooperative teaching. Another school found its movable walls especially useful when two classes were working on the same theme.

- **Renew the library:** Many literature-based and integrated approaches rely on a well-stocked school library. In many schools, libraries are being renewed and resources expended to make the library the heart of the school. One small rural school opens the library to the community two evenings a week and offers a story hour for children.

Funding

Most administrators and teachers are painfully aware of the costs involved in implementing a new curriculum. As we have seen, tens of thousands of dollars can be spent in revitalizing a library, providing a series of inservice trainings or redesigning facilities.

- **Reallocate existing funds:** Choosing to reallocate monies earmarked for basals and workbooks for literature, manipulatives, or book making supplies probably is the most common form of funding new instructional approaches. It is extremely unusual for a school to be awarded adequate funding to start from scratch. In several sites we contacted, districts allow buildings or individual teachers to choose how they should spend their allocated funds. In others, building administrators decide. In one site we contacted, the principal decided that workbooks and worksheets would be phased out over a period of three years. To cut down on use of worksheets, she provided copy machine counters to each department and placed a limit on numbers of copies per year.

- **Refund out-of-pocket expenses:** Although many teachers spend large amounts of their own money for classroom supplies, this practice is far from desirable as a funding strategy. One teacher we spoke with estimated she spent about $1000 of her own money each year on books for her classroom. In her words, "you want to respond on the spur of the moment to interests that arise among the children." As a strategy to address this problem, teachers in one district we contacted have recently negotiated a contract under which the district will reimburse them for up to $100.00 per year for out-of-pocket expenditures.

- **Write proposals for grants:** In most districts and states there is a range of grants available to fund various materials or activities. In one district a school was awarded a Chapter 2 grant to buy equipment and software for teaching low-performing first graders to write and read. Faculty later presented their plan to their parent association, showed a vendor's video of the proposed program, and got more money. In another school the principal submits a continual stream of proposals to funding bodies, regardless how small, and succeeds in securing grants. No grant, she says, is too small.

- **Use local talent and networks:** State Departments in each of the states offer some free yearly training directly related to the implementation of alternative approaches to reading and writing. District curriculum specialists are valuable, free resources for many schools; as mentioned earlier, many schools have found valuable, free expertise in their own buildings. One principal has "lots of friends in the field," and when an "expert" is coming through the area, he tries to talk him or her into making a brief visit to his building for a chat and some free advice.

Relationships

For any innovative instructional practice to succeed, it is necessary for the collaborating parties to cultivate a productive interrelationship. Our contact with a wide range of practitioners in the Northwest region suggests that two matrices of relationships are critically important. The first involves teachers, building administrators, district offices and State Departments. Because so much of the attention of this report has been on the local relationships of teachers and building administrators, we will focus here on relationships of sites with their district offices and State Departments. The second matrix of relationships involves the site and the ultimate suppliers and consumers of its product, parents and the larger community.

District Offices and State Departments. Relationships with school district central offices and State Departments of Education are sometimes key to the success of new and innovative approaches. While these offices are simultaneously responsible for monitoring and advice, such institutional relationships can make or break an effort at reforming curriculum.

- **Plug into existing networks:** In every state there are sets of movers and shakers who share ideas, strategies, and expertise on both the state and district levels. On the one hand, joining them connects a site with a range of resources. On the other hand, because these networks are channels for information, resources, and influence, they are sometime highly "political." Still, it is probably not coincidental that many of the sites we contacted which were succeeding in implementing alternative approaches were plugged into state and district networks.

- **Pioneer new approaches:** State curriculum specialists as well as their district counterparts were often extremely receptive to sites' requests for assistance implementing innovative curriculum. For example, one state allows certain requirements to be dropped for schools involved with innovative practices.

- **Play politics:** In districts where support for alternative approaches is not unanimous, some sites work carefully to cultivate support from patrons within the district office while not alienating others. In one site, a concerted effort was made to lobby the State Department to ensure a controversial textbook was added to the list of approved books.

- **Take an active role in change:** In no site did change "just happen." Risk takers struggled with more conservative colleagues to determine directions for states, districts and buildings. Many sites took active roles in shaping policy and programs. In one site, for example, the building administrator selected change-oriented teachers to serve on the district text adoption committee and succeeded in securing approval by the district of the textbooks his building wanted to use.

- **Follow the spirit if not the letter of the guide:** In one district which provides a textbook and a curriculum guide, one teacher told us she starts with the district guide when choosing units and teaches to the objectives, but supplements the textbook with literature.

Parents and community. The complex relationship between schools and parents is shaped by many factors. Though most of the sites we contacted had positive relationships with their parents and communities, many told "horror stories" of neighboring schools or districts less successful in their relationships. These "horrors" seem to have resulted from inattention to common sense strategies for educating and communicating with the public which successfully implementing schools take for granted.

- **Orient parents to the new approaches:** Many practitioners stressed the importance of orienting parents to instructional practices, especially in communities where approaches or materials might be judged objectionable. They mailed parents pamphlets which explain educational philosophy, practices and materials. These pamphlets set the stage for parent/teacher conferences and orientation meetings. Billed as "parent

nights," "kindergarten open house," and the like, these orientation meetings provide opportunities to educate parents.

- **Educate parents as well as children:** As one teacher stated, "Fifty percent of my job is educating children; the other fifty percent is educating parents." In successful sites, education of parents is never considered complete. Many sites send home weekly newsletters with information on a variety of topics. In one school the newsletter contains information on developmental levels, reading readiness, and encouragement for parents to read to their children and model their enjoyment of books. In another school a teacher attempted to convince parents of the merits of the new approach by demonstrating a lesson during a PTA meeting by bringing children on stage to recreate class activities.

- **Involve parents in reading and writing:** There are many strategies for involving parents in their children's reading and writing. Many schools planned special events to which parents were invited, e.g., an Authors' Tea and the 100th Day of School. Teachers often used journals as a medium to encourage children's writing both at school and home. One teacher sends a stuffed animal home with a different child every night. The animal has its own journal in which the child is supposed to write (with the help of the parents) what the animal did while a guest in the child's home. In many schools and classrooms, parent aides are a vital component in the success of the reading and writing program.

- **Reach out to the community:** Many teachers and administrators build community support by making sure that their programs and successes are well understood. For some principals this means speeches to the local Rotary club and articles in the local paper. For others it means having invitations to the 100-Day Reading Party announced over radio and television. In one site, teachers expand their classrooms by involving expert "teachers" such as firefighters and irrigation control officers to provide hands-on experience related to classroom themes.

- **Take seriously parents' concerns:** Successful implementations seem to correlate with anticipation of and serious attention to the concerns of parents with misgivings about alternative approaches. When confronted by a parent who protests her lack of attention to basals, one teacher explains that basals are available and students may read them, but that they are low quality in comparison to the integrated or whole language materials. A teacher in a different site holds lengthy conferences with parents who object to the new approach and provides them with handouts and books from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

- **Show parents results:** Concerns of parents are allayed when they see results, say many of the practitioners we spoke with. One teacher shows parents their child's progress by comparing books the child read and passages the child wrote early in the year with recent reading and writing. Home journals and parent check-off lists for books read at home not only provide the children with meaningful and pleasurable learning activities but also cultivate parents' understanding of their children's growth.

Special Needs: At-risk, Rural and ESL/Bilingual

In the words of one teacher, "Seventy-five percent learn to read no matter how it's taught. Of the twenty-five percent who have problems, you can help some or most of them (with innovative approaches)." Many of the sites we contacted saw dramatic, positive gains by children with special needs when the various alternative approaches to early literacy were put into place.

At-risk. Various alternative approaches focus on the use of developmentally appropriate materials and concentrate on the whole child, encouraging growth and learning at the child's own rate. This, say many practitioners, is the ideal approach for at-risk kids because of their need for individualized support.

- **Steep them in the environment of literacy:** Many at-risk students come from homes with low literacy levels; for many of these children phonics instruction is not very effective. Many teachers, principals, and curriculum specialists say that the literacy-rich environment of the whole language classroom is especially important for the growth of at-risk students.

- **Involve parents:** Almost all the alternative approaches target parent involvement. In one site the principal said that making parent involvement (in terms of journals, books, parent nights) the norm for all parents, makes it easier for parents of at-risk children who no longer feel their children are being singled out because they have "problems."

- **Eliminate or decrease pull-outs:** There is a clear trend among schools we contacted to eliminate or decrease pull-outs of special needs kids of all types. Many sites report that the elimination of pull-outs increases the self-esteem of these children, for they no longer see themselves as different from the rest. It is not only at-risk students who need individualized attention; the individualized approach of whole language-style classrooms is seen to have a positive impact on all children.

- **Identify at-risk factors:** In one school the principal stated, "We start from the point that every child is at-risk of failure and then work to ensure the success of each child as an individual." In a small rural school, a kindergarten teacher emphasized the need to identify and understand community factors contributing to educational risk. In her school, she said, nearly every child is at-risk as a result of varying degrees of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

- **Nurture individual growth:** As one teacher stated, "What's good for the gifted is good for all." Too often only students labeled "gifted" are encouraged to follow their own interests and learn at an individualized pace. Many sites reported that the individualized, cross-disciplinary approach is especially powerful in addressing the needs of their at-risk kids.

Rural schools. Most of the strategies we have discussed so far are directly applicable to rural schools. Implementing curricular changes in rural schools introduces a range of special problems. Typically, distances are great, instructional and training resources

are scarce, and poverty levels are high. As a result, the transferability of a program or curriculum from urban to rural settings is complex.

- **Encourage cooperative learning:** One of the features of small, rural schools is multigrade classrooms. One of the key instructional strategies of many alternative approaches in the region is cooperative learning, an approach which lends itself particularly well to multigrade classrooms.

- **Take advantage of staff turnover:** Several administrators in rural schools pointed to the problems and benefits of high staff turnover. While disruption can be severe (one small rural school had all new staff and a new principal in one year), sometimes a school with a vision can staff the school with individuals who share the vision.

- **Use the rural setting as classroom:** Though not limited to rural areas, several of the teachers and administrators we contacted in rural areas spoke of the advantages of teaching an integrated curriculum in their unique settings. One principal of a small rural school described her school's use of the "community as classroom" wherein firefighters, irrigation workers, environmental scientists and other people from the community helped create materials and manipulatives, guided children through walking field trips, and discussed environmental issues. These activities were woven into the curriculum encompassing reading, writing, science, math, social studies, and the like.

ESL and bilingual students. The concept of developmentally appropriate education which underpins many of the innovative practices and strategies discussed above is an ideal basis for addressing the special needs of ESL and bilingual students, say many of the practitioners we spoke with. The concept views children as progressing along a continuum of skills and abilities and suggests that instruction must focus on the individual child (not an ability group) to guide the child's progress along the continuum.

- **Keep ESL children in their classrooms:** Many practitioners who had ESL and/or bilingual students in their schools or classrooms made decisions to keep those students in the regular classroom whenever possible. Because children learn language in the context of the natural flow of language and activity around them, these practitioners believe ESL and bilingual children progress more quickly when they remain with other children in the regular classroom.

- **Adapt existing materials when possible:** As mentioned earlier, one school with a high percentage of bilingual students adapted existing English materials to the native language of the students. With the help of a bilingual aide, opening activities alternated between English and the native language. The aide's oral reading of a book in the native language was followed by reading of the same book in English.

- **Facilitate training for instructional aides:** Several sites reported that a key strategy was ongoing training of bilingual or ESL aides. In one small rural school, staff turnover has been so high that the aides, and not the certificated staff, are the anchor of stability for the school in the community. As in many similar communities, these aides are bilingual yet their English literacy skills are low. While the building principal and

classroom teachers were committed to a whole language approach, the aides who had been at the school for years were trained and experienced in seatwork, work sheets and basal readers. In this situation effective instruction was difficult at best. To address this common problem, Alaska has developed a summer training institute for classroom aides (many of whom are bilingual) on writing and literacy through the Alaska State Writing Consortium.

Barriers

Our informants described instructional innovations and implementation strategies in glowing terms, but they also discussed the difficulties they faced. These barriers and challenges fall into the following groups: internal school matters, affairs wider than the single school, resource factors, staff development concerns, and the nature of the student body. Most barriers cross-cut or combine some of these categories. Again, rather than being a complete list of barriers we heard about, our examples represent the kinds of constraints faculty and administrators encounter.

Barriers within the School

Issues involving the culture of teaching, administrative style, curriculum, and time limitation emerged in discussions of challenges and barriers to innovation.

The culture of teaching. Innovators often bemoaned some colleagues' resistance to change. In addition to structural factors (e.g., isolation, lack of support, overwork), they listed apprehension, lack of confidence, and conservatism as factors which underlie resistance. Several district- and building-level administrators in small towns and rural areas listed similar ingredients for inertia: teachers around age 40 and older, geographically isolated areas with low teacher turn-over, teachers trained in traditional methods, and limited training options. These factors combined to make it difficult to inspire change. One speaker said that the cooperation required by new methods is not habitual to teachers; another maintained that in the face of potential controversy teachers will avoid "taking up" new ways in order to avoid strife.

An additional barrier is the lack of communication and connection between primary teachers and those in intermediate grades and middle schools. This barrier results as much from structural factors (such as lack of time to meet) as from differences in training and philosophy. Even with pressure for greater accountability, it is difficult to get teachers across grades to meet and define essential competencies students should have or which instructional or learning processes should be emphasized across the grades.

Another barrier related to the cross-grade issue is the discrepant perceptions by many educators of "developmentally appropriate practices." Educators (especially those who teach older students) sometimes view such practices as "soft," lacking academic and intellectual rigor. That perception reinforces the isolation and the lack of respect that some primary teachers mention. Similarly, there are sometimes fundamental (and often unspoken) disagreements among faculty about how language actually develops among young children. This lack of a shared understanding is a source of tension and can create barriers to change.

Administrative obstacles. Principals and district administrators were faulted with errors ranging from "disliking" literacy reforms to "moving people too fast." Between these extremes were principals who allowed but did not actively participate in reform efforts and district employees who balked at the assessment changes reformers desired or mandated traditional report card formats. Principals committing the error of impatience were said to have "pets" who helped them "push" changes, imposed more building-based management than teachers cared to implement, used dictatorial policies, and required "twenty-five committees" (in a staff of eighteen).

Curricular challenges. Advocates of nontraditional approaches did not find them perfect. They blamed the imperfections on either the incompatibility of innovations with traditional methods or on the inherent limitations of the innovations themselves. With regard to incompatibility, teachers told us that they worry about effects of different instructional practices in different grades. They think the merits of their own students are not accurately assessed by standardized test results or accepted as the basis for further progress in grades beyond their own. One teacher went so far as to provide worksheets (which she considered a waste of time) in order to help her students adjust at the next grade level. Another teacher was exasperated at her former students' acceptance of worksheets in the next grade; she judged their patience was due to the novelty of the assignment.

A few practitioners found inadequacies in the new methods they employed. For example, one principal believes whole language "is not good for teaching writing;" another thinks explicit spelling and phonics lessons need to be added. One teacher makes those additions because she still has "those few students at the end of every year who can't read" and because she thinks total adherence to the literature-based approaches ignores the wisdom that individuals have their own learning styles.

Time limitations. Educators experience added time pressure with the new approaches. They need more individual time for "prep," e.g., setting up five literacy centers every morning and gathering resources. They also want more group time for ongoing workshops, monitoring each others' progress, and spontaneous conversations.

Barriers External to the School

Several of the factors which affect the success of innovation are often beyond the control of individual teachers and administrators. Limited opportunities for staff development, cross-cutting labor issues, and resistance from parents and the wider community were some of the factors which challenged innovators in schools we contacted.

Unmet needs for staff development. Limitations of staff development stem mainly from financial problems and geographical isolation. Teachers' needs mentioned in our phone conversations include increased knowledge of interdisciplinary teaching and multiple intelligences, ways to use the new materials schools are purchasing, and philosophical underpinnings of whole language. Several practitioners noted that intermediate-level teachers in particular would benefit from seminars to extend their understanding of current pedagogy. A state director observed that principals too require extensive education in these topics in order to lead schools. Finally, staff members from several sites explained how much easier it would be to initiate contextual uses of literacy skills if aides were better prepared for nontraditional education. Moreover, in some areas, aides hired for their ability to speak languages

other than English would be more helpful if their own English literacy skills were higher.

Unions and labor issues. Innovation occurs within a complex matrix of factors, and labor issues sometimes emerge during the process of change. When this happens, unions may play a role in the success or failure of the innovation. One person said that unions put up their "traditional" resistance to change. At one site several years ago a union opposed the plan of a music teacher and classroom teacher to teach cooperatively by giving up their planning time. In the only other incident of union opposition in our data, the union criticized a principal for "riding" an older, skills-oriented teacher to try some new methods.

Parent and community resistance. Parents in area after area have been concerned about the new approaches, often concluding that the absence of phonics worksheets and spelling tests like the ones they had as children indicate lack of instruction in these skills. Among Native American parents questions along these lines may be fueled by the highly structured educations most parents received in Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools. A separate but related controversy surrounds the introduction of rich literature as explicit skills instruction diminishes or becomes embedded in lessons focusing on larger texts. The strong voice of factions objecting to the content of some classroom literature constrains some educators' choices.

Barriers Due to Resource Limitations

Lack of funds can limit many components of the new instructional approaches. Class size can markedly affect the success of innovative approaches to teaching literacy which require so much individual attention, but the number of children in a classroom is usually outside the control of individual buildings or administrators. In addition, teachers often need more books for classroom libraries, multiple copies of stories, aides to help at-risk children in their own classrooms, money for courses, manipulatives and storage space for organizing them, and other things and services.

Challenges Presented by Special Student Populations

While many practitioners think their innovations have promise for at-risk students, they also see impediments to delivering those benefits when the students depend almost entirely on the school for food, change schools frequently, and have parents who are unable to actively encourage their learning. Welcoming at-risk students back into the main classroom is a double-edged sword, for the benefits are nearly outweighed by the unmet need for more assistance from aides and volunteers. In addition, at-risk students' Individualized Education Plans (I.E.P.'s), by focusing on skills, can confound whole language planning.

Facilitating Factors

Support for innovators and their strategies comes from a variety of sources within and outside the world of education. Some common types of sources and a few of the many glowing examples we collected are below.

Staff

The qualities of individuals which enable them to introduce the new models are excellent teaching ability, professional stance, willingness to keep abreast of trends, teaching experience, commitment, and "soul." But the capacity to work with others is the ingredient which turns a collection of productive individuals into an institution which fosters productive change. People told us that the cooperative work involved when a group changes rests on dialogue, initiative, mutual support, and peer pressure. Certain types of groups tend to facilitate literacy innovations: groups of primary teachers, small school staffs, faculty with a high proportion of new members, and faculty with consensus for change.

Local and State Administration

Our data suggest that support from each administrative level makes a difference for innovators. Those we interviewed were thankful for principals who take a strong role in leading change; one praised a superintendent who "put himself on the line" for change. Districts facilitate change by advancing assessment innovations, granting teachers freedom to choose materials, and funding inservice. School district and Education Service District curriculum specialists often are central in providing inservice and facilitating support groups. Schools in one county coordinated textbook adoption so that all could benefit from the same in-services.

Curriculum

According to some of the educators we interviewed, the merits of the new materials and methods promote smooth implementation. First, students prefer the beautiful literature which is a mainstay of the changes. Secondly, the new materials are compatible with old materials which may be retained as supplements. Third, the new literacy programs can be seen as practical "restructuring" of curriculum for effective instruction rather than radical new goals. Finally, in some areas, the new curriculum fits district guidelines, local educational objectives, and teachers' current styles better than did the old curriculum. Illustrating compatibility with current styles, one teacher claimed that the classroom management principles which go along with literature-based education are good, another that "it's natural for kids to help each other."

Sources of Staff Development

The "academic connection" facilitates informed risk-taking. Practitioners seek out research to serve as the foundation for their attempts to improve teaching. People spoke with admiration of administrators' academic credentials, involvement in state-level policy making, and contributions at conferences. Several teachers relied on college course content for reform ideas and professors and fellow students for support.

In-services also play a major role in facilitating change. Several teachers preferred those taught by teachers or ex-teachers. In-building, paid in-services are more convenient for teachers. One scheme for disseminating change is to educate the leading teachers in a building first and then have them teach others.

Unions

Although unions are not highly involved in many stages of the process of introducing new sorts of lessons in literacy, their contractual agreements about teachers' work influence the staffing patterns behind instruction. One union promised to support a school in its requests for the larger class size which might accompany multigrade classes. In a new school, a union granted a waiver of contract rules so that the principal could plan innovative staffing patterns.

Parents and Community

School supporters are diverse and offer a variety of services. In one remote village an instructional aide has sung praises of the program throughout the community, a critical development because aides remain respected community members while teachers come and go. An urban school principal described the supportive parent community: "The African Americans see new hope in literacy innovations, and middle class parents are enthusiastic." In other sites, parent and community volunteers brought dinner to teachers during their in-services, the P.T.A. created hundreds of blank books for children to write in, and a civic club donated time and expertise to network distributed computer labs.

Resources

Unexpected funds occasionally fueled innovation. One school had money set aside which teachers used for classroom libraries. Trade book publishers offer "bonus points" to teachers whose students buy many paperbacks; teachers use the points to fill out classroom libraries. In order to promote whole language, a district supplied a professional library to every school. A state's offer to fund experimental projects motivated a faculty to try a collaborative early literacy model for regular and special education students.

Student Outcomes

The results of new literacy education facilitate the change process. Adults proclaim that "it's working!" especially for ESL and at-risk students. A school with large at-risk and ESL populations, initially labeled by its district as one of the worst schools in the city, reported that its increase in reading comprehension scores was two and a half standard deviations above the district average. Another urban school with many language groups is witnessing such high English scores and high rates of graduation from bilingual programs that it might need to close some of these. Success is not limited to academic areas. For example, poor students of one experienced teacher are manifesting less distress at adjusting to first grade than did students in past years.

Assessment and Evaluation

In the schools and districts whose staff participated in these depiction interviews, assessment has rarely kept pace with instructional change. As noted at the beginning of this report, changes in assessment are beginning to take place at the state level. For example, Montana's model curriculum emphasizes what in the past have been called "alternative" forms of assessment. Assessment of student outcomes (performance) and

program evaluation cause great concern and conflict as well as great excitement for teachers who are implementing changes in their teaching techniques.

Assessment Concerns

Practitioners voice a number of assessment concerns. Administrators and teachers are concerned with public accountability. They feel the need for building/district consistency in expectations for student achievement. They recognize the need to have measures for identifying children with special needs. At the same time, they fear having tests drive the curriculum or single out students with different learning styles. They puzzle over the utility of norm-referenced assessment tools, wondering, "What if the 'norm' is low?" Some struggle with transient student populations, a reality that makes longitudinal tracking of the results of innovations impossible. Clearly, these are not new concerns in assessment. It seems, however, that the nature of the innovations currently being implemented in early literacy bring these assessment issues into sharper focus.

Most teachers are concerned about the compatibility between what they are teaching and how they are required to measure it. In the majority of districts standardized tests are considered to be a major measure of academic progress. They are also used to identify students in need of special services (such as Chapter 1). We have found that the jury is still out on the issue of the validity of such tests for measuring the progress of students in innovative classrooms. In schools where whole language or literature-based approaches, for example, are being implemented for the first time, teachers are worried about how their students will do on the required standardized test. Many assume they won't do as well as their peers who are in more traditional classrooms because they haven't had the practice in filling out worksheets and taking such tests. One teacher reported that her students did score lower than their "strictly basal" counterparts.

Some administrators and teachers are so pleased with the day-to-day results they are observing in the classroom ("Children ARE reading!" "They're reading anything they can get their hands on." "You can't stop 'em!") that they are willing to wait a year or so, convinced that they will see tremendous gains in test scores. One district confronted this issue head on. Teachers within this district were divided over the effectiveness of more traditional, basal-oriented teaching techniques and more innovative, integrated language arts methods and materials. By comparing the standardized test results of literature-based classes with those of basal-based classes, this district found that literature-based students performed exceptionally well on standardized tests. In fact, at every grade level, the average percentile performance of literature-based classes was from 2 to 7 percentage points higher than that of the basal classes.

Assessment Methods in Use

We discovered a wide range of assessment activities throughout the region. Some teachers and administrators are being very creative, willing to try (for them) radically new ways of documenting their students' progress. Most are struggling to find a middle path that allows them to measure what their students are learning and comply with assessment requirements currently in place at the building or district level.

Standardized tests. The vast majority of districts contacted are still using standardized testing as a way of measuring student achievement. A variety of tests are in use, including the SRA, the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT), and the California Achievement Test (CAT).

Textbook tests. Many teachers in the region are using these prepared tests, some because they are required by their school or district, others because they consider them planned, sequential assessments that help them maintain consistency across same grade teachers and from one grade to the next.

Checklists, flow charts, "nonnegotiables". Several schools and districts have adopted lists of developmentally appropriate skills fundamental to student progress and achievement that all their teachers must use. In some cases, these lists have been developed by the teachers themselves through a lengthy school- or district-wide process. The schools using such lists note that they have been very effective in helping to ease tension among factions of teachers espousing different instructional methods. However, some schools consider checklists to be too categorical, as if implying that children "either have it or they don't."

Portfolio assessments. There is considerable interest in the use of portfolios of children's work to assess their progress. This method lends itself well to instructional approaches that encourage students to express themselves and write often. Teachers find it effective not only in documenting progress but also in diagnosing areas for further instruction.

Observation and documentation of literacy behaviors. This and the following assessment method are commonly employed by teachers and administrators in the midst of implementing innovative approaches. Precisely because of what they are seeing daily in the classroom and hearing from parents, they are excited about the changes and convinced that these changes will make a difference in children's learning in later years. Children are reading; they are reading at a younger age; they are writing incredibly complex things (the likes of which have not been seen by teachers with 20 years of experience teaching children to read and write!); they are discussing plots and character development; they are ordering more and more books. Some practitioners rather apologetically note that their assessments are informal, intuitive, and anecdotal at this point, but they are convinced of their significance and validity.

Observation and documentation of attitudes about literacy. Innovative teachers and administrators note striking changes in children's attitudes about reading and writing and report that parents are delighted to note these changes also. Children are excited about reading and writing, anxious to share what they've written, thrilled they can read other children's stories, bored by basals, interested in print in the world around them, confident they CAN read.

Redesigned report cards. Teachers report the need for changing the nature of report cards to reveal the kinds of stages of learning going on. New report cards structure information on stages of literacy development, skill groups, and specific skills.

Program and Approach Evaluation

All administrators we contacted are aware of the need to evaluate new programs and approaches carefully. In a handful of sites where innovations have been implemented

throughout the district, administrators and curriculum developers have taken the opportunity to conduct formal evaluations of the process and the outcomes. One district, with outside university assistance, is conducting surveys of teachers, parents and children to gather critical data to add to the results of the various formal and informal assessment tools mentioned above. Another, cited earlier, conducted a year of research which included comparisons of standardized test results for literature-based classes and basal-based classes.

Others have been more focused on formative program evaluation during the change process. Several sites have built in regular, structured feedback from teachers and administrators through building and district committees. We found that these educational innovators agree that the involvement of teachers both in implementing instructional changes and in evaluating them is absolutely essential to the improvement of teaching and outcomes for all children.

The Main Issues of Literacy Program Renewal

Several closely related sets of issues arise as teachers and administrators implement innovations in literacy education.

Curriculum and Instruction

Teaching language arts involves a set of far-reaching decisions about curriculum and instruction. Although research and experience guide teachers to try new ideas, they still face tough decisions about the role of traditional phonics, spelling, grammar, and penmanship in curricula. There are no simple answers. Even the questions are complex, i.e., not "Do I teach phonics?" but "To what extent do I explicitly address the sound/symbol relationship?" This very complexity seems to be a boon for education as it leads teachers to close observation and analysis of student behavior and to creative instruction.

Beyond determining the sizes of units of language to emphasize, practitioners must determine the appropriate activities and groupings in which to embed them. Customs regulating subject delineation, classroom management, and time allocation need to be reconsidered.

Remediation

Forging new literacy approaches also entails taking a fresh look at remediation. Many teachers we talked with are concluding that for young children experiencing learning difficulties the earliest possible intervention is the most effective. It is crucial to reach students before they experience the compounding of problems of low self-esteem, inadequate skills, and dependence on special instructional programs--factors which can lead to a downward spiral of achievement. At the same time, professionals are reasoning that early intervention is cost-effective in the long run because it decreases the need for years of services (including, for some, life-long services resulting from unemployment). With this broad financial picture in mind, some elementary schools in each state are reducing special education in the later grades in order to accommodate learners with difficulties in the earlier grades.

Having made the decision to focus on the learning difficulties of young children in the early grades, schools must decide which early intervention method(s) is most effective. An increasingly common response is to provide one-on-one instruction, often by means of Reading Recovery, an approach in which a specially trained teacher takes individuals out of their regular classroom for short periods until they have reached the average achievement level for that class. Another tutorial program, Help One Student to Succeed (H.O.S.T.), involves volunteers. At issue in designing interventions are the effects of pulling students out of their classrooms to join remedial groups. Schools are devising staffing patterns which enable them to bring specialists, teachers, and aides into the classrooms to assist remedial students individually and/or instruct the entire class in a way which addresses the needs of all the students.

Instructional Materials

Where instruction has emphasized phonics, literature-based education requires many resources not readily available, e.g., multiple copies of novels, manipulatives for learning centers, and computers. Each site faces serious allocation decisions. It is not yet clear whether the new resources necessarily cost more than basal and workbook series, but massive conversions can be extremely expensive; some schools maintain both sorts of resources. The blending of materials is continually being worked out.

One issue which arises at the district level during textbook selection is pressure by sections of the public for or against certain types of material. The Holt *Impressions* series has been the subject of controversy in at least three districts where citizens objected to the fantasy content of some of the stories. Such objections can have a chilling effect on literature-based approaches due to educators' dependence on levies to support their efforts.

At the state level, issues surrounding textbook adoption in general are especially prominent in regard to language arts materials, because the new, wider array of instructional alternatives is encouraging teachers to create their own sets of materials. Publishers are reacting to this expanding market by offering an ever increasing variety of products. Adoption lists (in states where such lists exist), evaluation criteria, and procedures for approval need on the one hand to provide flexibility for innovators and on the other hand to ensure quality control of increasingly diverse material.

Assessment

As teachers alter their instructional practices, questions about assessment loom large. Most of these questions relate to perceived incompatibility between new practices and traditional measures of performance, especially standardized and basal tests. Building and district educators need to establish the separate functions of norm-referenced tests and other performance assessments. Exciting alternatives to traditional evaluation--miscue analysis of early reading, portfolios of early writing, new report card formats, and others--do not end the challenges in these areas, for they demand staff cooperation, time and technical skills. Many people who spoke to us were relatively experienced in the latest trends in language arts yet admitted to being "beginners" at piecing together evaluation strategies.

Faculty Relations

Delicate work in faculty relations faces any school endeavoring to put reforms in place. In the schools we learned about, the challenge was either consensus building or conflict management. In the former case, faculty expressed agreement to move in a direction toward some method or mix of methods of alternative early literacy instruction. In the latter case, schools housed two clear factions: phonics-oriented and literature-oriented teachers. (One principal noted acrimonious debate which arose in discussion groups formed to consider literature-based instruction. Another school used the tense debates as an impetus to explore and implement change.) In some schools the relational task was quite different: one teacher experimenting with nontraditional reading curriculum strived to influence others or at least find acceptance.

It is foreseeable that reforms as philosophically and practically far-reaching as curriculum integration would cause entrenchment by some individuals in their own world view. One State Department director suggested that, at least with regard to whole language, many educators "live in a bi-modal world" tending not to see "in-betweens." Certainly the goals, planning and instructional behavior, and language of the two groups we heard about support this interpretation. However, we do not want to paint too dark a picture of disagreements, for most interviewees had formulated successful strategies for communication and decision-making. Moreover, many teachers who are zealous in applying new techniques also intentionally retain customary practices, carefully experimenting with ways to fit them in.

Every person we interviewed discussed the degrees of autonomy and freedom which people allow each other at the building level. Principals frequently voiced the opinion that teachers should be involved in instructional decisions and, if they are not interested in developing new teaching skills, should be "brought along" gradually by means of staff development, phase-in schedules, and patience. A few principals took a stronger stance, by requiring teachers to attend training sessions and by evaluating them on the basis of their introduction of new teaching methods.

Teachers too face the issue of how much to "push" colleagues to risk innovations. Many claimed that their students' products (posted in the halls) and skills "recruit" faculty to try alternative methods. Several practitioners mentioned that teachers' isolation in their rooms is one factor involved here. Transmission of innovations by its nature feeds off and fuels interaction; if teachers close their doors as they have traditionally been allowed to do, they are less apt to understand and participate in the culture of those trying new literacy practises. The struggle for reform, then, is partly an endeavor to have people "open up" doors, meetings, and minds.

Staff Development

The staff development issue for the innovators we spoke with is not <u>whether</u> to study new views of literacy, but <u>how</u> to stretch financial and human resources. The potentials of development revolve around the time, money, and commitment staff can devote to it and the accessibility and quality of training opportunities. Training must compete against routine duties and other innovations. Moreover, in some sites teachers receive as little as $100 per year for development. Under constraints like these, and for philosophical reasons, some teachers resist reform. Rural areas have the added obstacle of distance. Far from universities and the invigorating contacts of urban centers, rural teachers sometimes rely on publishers' workshops for training and find them insufficiently comprehensive. One district noted its use of teleconferencing as a

way to expand training opportunities for its staff. The need for development of instructional approaches for at-risk students is especially great; in several states professionals bemoan the absence of a training center for Reading Recovery or any corresponding approach.

Professional organizations and teachers' unions are significant players in development. Offerings include publications by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), American Society for Curriculum Development (ASCD), International Reading Association (IRA), American Association of School Administrators (AASA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and many other professional organizations, workshops by state principals' associations, and teacher-led courses under union auspices. Our interviews suggest that union support for literacy innovations is growing: They tell of instances several years ago in which unions opposed staffing patterns intended to support innovations, more recent instances in which unions worked with principals by waiving contract rules for the same sorts of changes, and current plans to offer workshops in language arts integration. Similarly, one union which used to protect teachers' prerogative to determine the use of inservice funds has reversed its stand to support building administrators' and teachers' requests for more whole language requirements.

ADVENTURES AT ALKI ELEMENTARY: A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL-WIDE LITERACY CHANGE

by Sylvia Hart-Landsberg

Alki's Challenge

This is a tale of the literacy renewal program at Alki Elementary School. Located on the West Seattle peninsula swept clean by the winds of Puget Sound in the state of Washington, the school is an appropriate setting for a stirring adventure about heroes and heroines who vanquish an old demon, harnessing its powers for the good of the people it had once overwhelmed.

"The people" are approximately 300 students (and their families) and 18 teachers. Many of the teachers have taught at Alki for several years or more. About half the students are bilingual, representing 19 languages, including Eritrean, Spanish, and many Asian languages. The school is economically diverse: Although slightly more than half the students are eligible for free or reduced lunches, a good portion are well off. Only 22 students live in the school's immediate area; the others are bused from several parts of West Seattle and South Seattle.

Five years ago the school was under the influence of an oppressive "dragon"--a school climate characterized by divisiveness and resistance to change among staff and dissatisfaction with the academic program among parents. Fed by low standardized test scores, high turn-over rate of administrators, and a dismaying diversity of student needs, it cast a "spell" over organizational and instructional change.

A series of challenging developments had led to this state. In 1978 Seattle had desegregated schools, introducing more minority students to Alki. A few years later the district had begun to disaggregate achievement test scores by ethnicity, revealing stark educational needs of some minority students. One principal, in order to accommodate the many achievement levels in each grade, imposed an experiment in cross-grade classes which was unsuccessful. Alki scores were continually declining. Parents active in school affairs were voicing concerns about rigid grades, unfriendly atmosphere, and low academic standards.

But today the school has tamed the "dragon" of school climate. Alki adults openly confront the need for change, and the students are increasingly successful and intellectually stimulated. The efforts behind this transformation are the topic of this case study.

Garnering Forces for Change

It was not magic that "tamed" school climate, making it "friendly" to literacy innovation. One "secret" was *leadership style*: Alki "heroes and heroines" have been more stalwart than dramatically courageous. Rather than setting themselves apart from others, they have depended on the "common folk"--teachers and parents who accompanied them in the quest for change. Another "secret" for fostering good relations was *realism*--organizing the change process, studying new instructional

approaches, planning a literacy program for the whole school, and respecting a variety of classroom styles. In fact, Louise McKinney, the Seattle School District Director of Student Academic Achievement who has struggled for change along with Alki, bristles when admirers suggest that it is leaders' charisma that leads to victories in literacy education. She knows that the process of change, as any adventure, stands to be more successful the more it is planned.

In spite of the value of planning along the way, at the outset there was no clear vista of the route and the contests it held, no consensus as to the ideal system at the end, no knowledge that a hidden key to success only needed to be unearthed. Beyond establishing general goals--improving student performance and equipping adults with opportunities for cooperation and inquiry--there was no "map" to go by.

Uniting Organizational Forces

In 1988 Pat Sander was assigned the principalship of Alki. She had already heard that Alki "ran principals away," but the month she was assigned to take on the job the Seattle School District released even more dismal news: Alki had been designated as one of 20 schools most in need of reform. The pressure was on as the district gave these schools two weeks to submit proposals for extra support called "Academic Achievement" funds.

The Alki team was up to the challenge. Pat was already well-grounded in the theory and practice of the early childhood model which the Office of Academic Achievement promotes (see Figure 1). Its basic tenets are that all children should be taught at an appropriate *level* of instruction, at their best learning *rate*, in the *way* they best learn. As Ms. McKinney reminded principals, the characteristics of the early childhood model are instructional and curricular practices which can be institutionalized--they are "not inscrutable, not mysteries to be solved."

Based on her experience and the "go-ahead" from many parents, Pat was able to write a proposal for a school based on the early childhood model and include a plan for a summer school. Before the test scores hit the papers, Alki (and seven other schools) had been awarded Academic Achievement money.

The faculty's advances after that time repeated the pattern of finding institutional support outside the school to support internal change. Each improvement project the school "joined" constituted an opportunity to plan the change process. First, as a Washington School for the 21st Century, the school received a grant from the governor's office for restructuring. Next, feeling befuddled as to how to proceed on such a comprehensive task, the staff found structure in the Accelerated Schools Project led by Henry M. Levin of Stanford, (Levin, 1987; Levin & Hopfenberg, 1991). This project outlines the steps of systematic change: taking stock, developing a vision statement, setting priorities, establishing a governance structure (in Alki's case, a site council of parents and teachers), and designating cadres to work on the priorities. The Accelerated Schools Project is noted in the world of education reform for its counsel to schools to secure modest reforms based on local goals and research before trying to change the whole school.

By the time they adopted the Accelerated Schools process, Alki professionals already had advanced through its initial steps, due to their involvement with Seattle's Office of Academic Achievement and Washington's Schools for the 21st Century. In the spring of 1991 they were embarking on an "advanced" step of the Accelerated Schools process

called "the inquiry process." This step entails doing formal and informal research on a problem area, brainstorming solutions by looking inside and outside the school, forming an action plan, taking action, and running a small test program to evaluate, revise, and implement the plan school-wide.

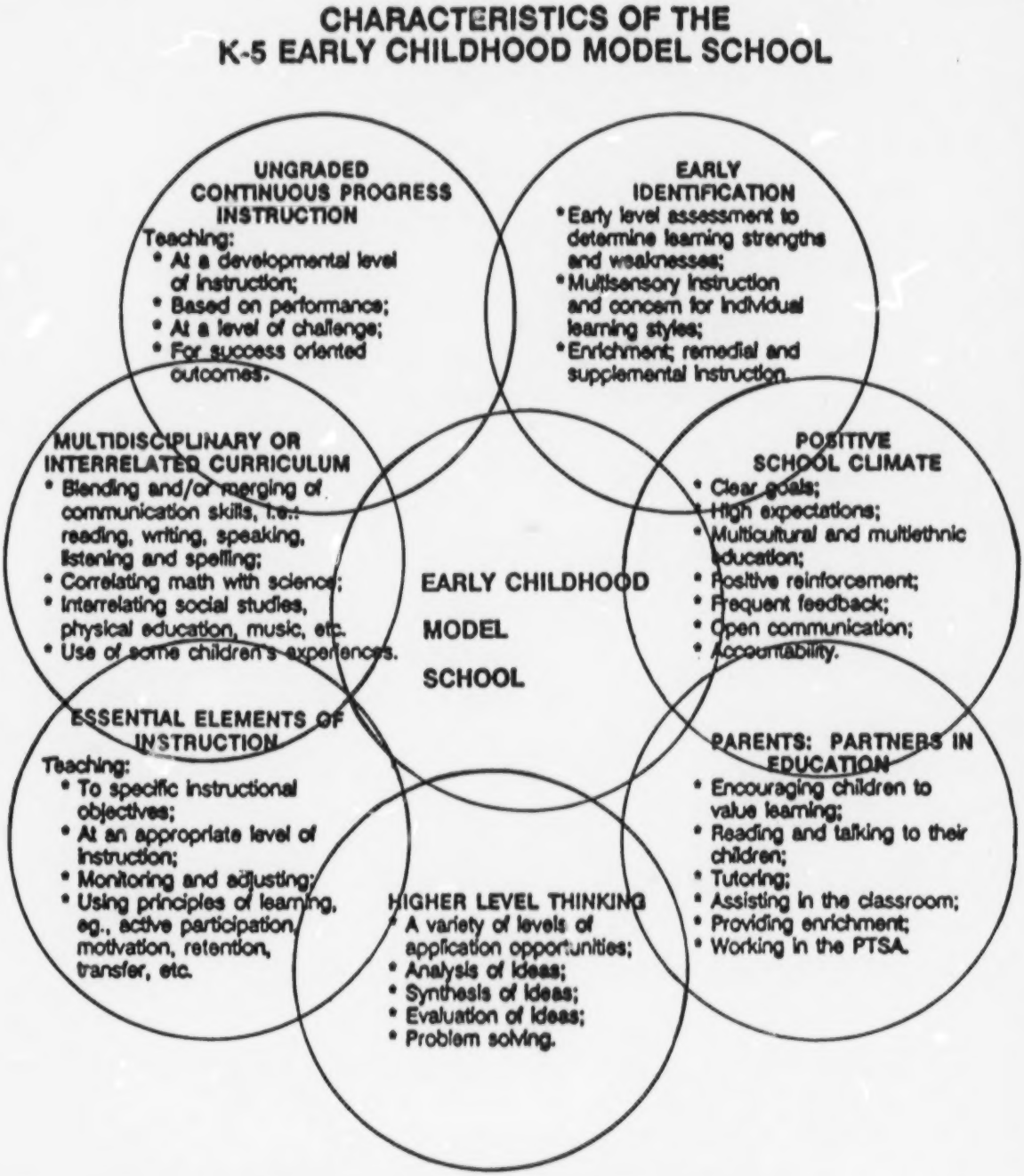
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
K-5 EARLY CHILDHOOD MODEL SCHOOL
UNGRADED CONTINUOUS PROGRESS INSTRUCTION
Teaching:
• At a developmental level of instruction;
• Based on performance;
• At a level of challenge;
• For success oriented outcomes.
EARLY IDENTIFICATION
• Early level assessment to determine learning strengths and weaknesses;
• Multisensory instruction and concern for individual learning styles;
• Enrichment; remedial and supplemental instruction.
MULTIDISCIPLINARY OR INTERRELATED CURRICULUM
• Blending and/or merging of communication skills, i.e.: reading, writing, speaking, listening and spelling;
• Correlating math with science;
• Interrelating social studies, physical education, music, etc.
• Use of some children's experiences.
EARLY CHILDHOOD MODEL SCHOOL
POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE
• Clear goals;
• High expectations;
• Multicultural and multiethnic education;
• Positive reinforcement;
• Frequent feedback;
• Open communication;
• Accountability.
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF INSTRUCTION
Teaching:
• To specific instructional objectives;
• At an appropriate level of instruction;
• Monitoring and adjusting;
• Using principles of learning, eg., active participation, motivation, retention, transfer, etc.
HIGHER LEVEL THINKING
• A variety of levels of application opportunities;
• Analysis of ideas;
• Synthesis of ideas;
• Evaluation of ideas;
• Problem solving.
PARENTS: PARTNERS IN EDUCATION
• Encouraging children to value learning;
• Reading and talking to their children;
• Tutoring;
• Assisting in the classroom;
• Providing enrichment;
• Working in the PTSA.

Figure 1. Source: Louise J. McKinney, Memorandum to K-5 ECM Principals. Seattle School District Office of Academic Achievement. January 11, 1989.

Developing Staff Powers

Just as "projects" (Academic Achievement, Schools for the 21st Century, and Accelerated Schools) served as "tools" for setting the course toward an improved literacy program, staff development activities have served as "medicines" to stimulate ideas and ease the discomfort that comes along with change. Early on, Louise and Pat traveled to Compton, California, to visit schools renowned for developing successful early childhood education in an urban environment. Teachers also had a variety of opportunities to learn about new approaches. These included a variety of training sessions. A district specialist taught about learning styles; teachers from other schools demonstrated the use of Box It and Bag It materials; Professor Levin of Stanford guided the Accelerated Schools Project. In spite of this plethora of programs, the staff's "curriculum" was unified because all the trainers "talked the same language" and had even met each other.

Although teachers weren't required to participate in most training, the professional goal-setting process which they all undertake each fall often led them to seek courses. As it turned out, these usually channeled teachers toward theory and practice in line with the early childhood model because, as one expert put it, courses on "basalism" and phonics abstracted from context are no longer offered in the area. Similarly, although teachers who want to emphasize conventional spelling are not forbidden to do so and may hold on to their old spelling books until they wear out, there is no movement afoot to support this interest. So it diminishes as they encounter alternative ways to teach spelling.

Both enthusiastic as well as reluctant adventurers in new approaches to literacy received the same encouragement to keep going. For example, when the district offered a summer workshop to develop whole language units ready for classroom use, two "gung-ho" teachers and one who was "not so" were signed up. The creative process deepened their comprehension that under-achievers often are global processors who are being taught in an analytical way unsuitable for them. All three produced top-notch thematic booklets which are now available across Seattle. All three, feeling valued for the first time in years, approached the new school year with renewed energy.

Thus, in a neat twist, rallying around a change process brought about the very goal the process was aimed at--fostering an atmosphere favorable to excellent education. Staff development and programs with long names (like Schools for the 21st Century) structured ongoing commitment and concern for quality across the entire program. School climate was improved because it was not left to chance.

Outfitting Alki for Effective Instruction: A School-wide Program

With the programs for restructuring and staff development activities, Alki staff proceeded to organize a school program which enhances each child's opportunities for successful literacy experiences. Definitely not set in stone, it is continually being developed. This section describes the major components of that program as they were in the spring of 1991.

Homeroom Classes

Alki covers kindergarten through fifth grade. Kindergarten and first grade classes are single-grade groups, except for one split K-1 class. A few years ago more K-1 splits

were assigned, but the teachers voted to change them to uni-grades because they "wanted to get kids off to a good start," especially since all-day kindergarten is so demanding on them. Above first grade, all classes are splits--2/3, 3/4, and 4/5. In each split the two grades learn together as a whole group with one curriculum.

Block Literacy Classes

"Basic Skills Block" is the school-wide framework for literacy classes. Each morning, primary students are regrouped for literacy classes. Homeroom, bilingual, and special education teachers each take a Block class. Before Pat arrived the staff had started a simple language Block schedule by prescribing one time for every class in the school to read, then pulling the P.E. teacher and a few other specialists out of their regular duties to form reading classes. With the go-ahead from the new principal to design their own program, teachers developed the Block system further. In order to use bilingual and special education faculty for classes which include nonspecial students, Ms. Sander forged cooperation among Chapter 1 and bilingual funding sources, the teachers' union, and staff.

The theoretical rationale for the Block type of arrangement is that recruiting an increased number of faculty to teach literacy creates classes which are smaller than homerooms. And since Block classes are distinct from homerooms, the criteria for assigning students can be different. Groups can form on the basis of common skill level, learning style, or degree of English proficiency. At first glance such grouping might appear to fly in the face of the effort at Alki (and many schools) to decrease homogeneous grouping. However, Block classes, by taking individuals' literacy skills into account in a very sensitive way for part of the day, can leave homerooms (during the rest of the day) free to be much more heterogeneous.

The Bilingual Program

The bilingual complex is a large room the size of two or three classrooms and a closet, both used for instruction. During lunch and other free periods it is "full" of students "hanging out;" during class periods it often houses as many as five classes, each working hard on reading or writing. One morning, on the primary side of the complex, a whole group read a Big Book together, and a smaller group in the closet took turns reading a text orally. On the intermediate side, a group read a basal with a teacher (who explained precisely how each suffix they encountered in the story should be pronounced in several linguistic contexts), and two groups worked on writing with the help of bilingual aides. Bilingual education occurs in other locations too, of course, for bilingual students spend a large part of their day in homeroom classes where English literacy is taught in many subjects.

Special Education

Special education at Alki is evolving along with other components of the instructional program. In 1990-1991 the special education teacher pulled students out of homerooms to form special classes. By never taking them during their Basic Skills Block, she provided them with twice the normal amount of literacy instruction. She recognized that this benefit was accompanied by a disadvantage: They were being pulled out of the very subjects in which they were apt to be more successful--arts, social studies, and special projects. This situation led her to consider two alternative solutions to the

riddle of how to reduce pull-outs (and the stigma and less stimulating classes which sometimes are associated with them): (1) *go into classrooms to help students*, thus depending on homeroom teachers to plan with her, or (2) *operate on a consultant basis working with individuals or small groups*, also relying on orchestration with other teachers. In her opinion, reducing pull-outs will not be a total solution because some students with learning problems need special classes.

Achievement Levels

In confronting the challenge to restructure the types of classes described above, Alki staff faced and continue to face the issue of tracking. For some grades the principal pays attention to students' progress when assigning students to their homerooms. In the spring teachers tell her the general skill level of each student so that she can use this information to help form "workable" homerooms for the fall. Literacy skill level is given more weight in the assignment of students to their Block classes. For example, the first grade teachers send their kids with the very lowest skills to a third teacher for Block. Otherwise they do not ability group Blocks, and they keep as many children as possible together with their homeroom class and teacher for Block. The other grades follow roughly the same pattern. One two/three split class remains nearly intact for Block; some of its bilingual students and a few who need extra help for other reasons leave for Block. Within each homeroom and Block class, instruction moves from whole group orientation to small, flexible groups based on many criteria, to individual work.

Assessment

In the adventure of implementing literature-based instruction, Alki faces the same trial many schools face: aligning testing and evaluation procedures with instructional methods and materials. The district requires Alki to administer California Achievement Tests to every grade for ten days each spring and keep records on the results. Staff consensus holds that this testing is necessary although they regret the time it demands. The teachers try to promote success in test taking by requiring teachers to administer basal unit tests (without necessarily assigning every basal story). Report cards describe students' skill development in some detail. Some individuals are beginning to develop alternative evaluation strategies by using portfolios and considering the potential of a video recorder for evaluation purposes.

The Library

Converting and maintaining the library to serve a literature-oriented curriculum requires "stretching" in several directions. First, the library's hours have been increased so that it is accessible to students before and after school. Second, the librarian strives to keep up on the burgeoning number of children's books, reviews, and other literature. Third, her collaboration with teachers is necessary to provide material for their themes, learn their class schedules, supply multiple copies of novels for class reading, make suggestions about materials, and otherwise take an active role in literacy acquisition. Fourth, she tackles considerable clerical work. For this she has recruited a volunteer by putting a notice on a grocery bulletin board.

The Computer Program

The computer program thrives under the conscientious guidance of a parent volunteer who has "stuck with it" for several years. He started off by advising teachers not to disperse computers across classrooms but to collect them in a small room adjacent to the library. (This way one adult can oversee the work of about six kids at a time.) In addition to *one location*, he claims, a successful computer curriculum requires two things: *a person dedicated to creating and maintaining it* and *machine accessibility for every single student*.

The computer volunteer visited many schools to learn about software use. Then Alki offered school computers to families for the summer, with the proviso that they review programs. Those they panned were not purchased. An anecdote about this episode brought chuckles at a parents' meeting. One husband and wife who had borrowed a computer had taken to writing insults to each other on the Oregon Trail program. In the fall they sheepishly asked for help erasing them before turning in the computer.

Each Alki student has passed a one-hour, hands-on computer training session and owns a disk. Disks and computer paper were donated by parents, other community members (mustered by an advertisement in a community circular), the district, and the company which is Alki's partner in a coalition called "Private Industry, Public Education." Each student also has a computer card, kept in the library in a pocket with his or her library card. To work in the computer room, whether or not the adult supervisor is present, the child pulls the card and posts it in the computer room. Any student who abuses computer privileges has the card revoked.

Summer School

Alki summer school is an innovative way for teachers to continue students' exposure to literacy during vacation. It convenes four days a week, at a different school each day of the week. The schools are in neighborhoods which send children to Alki. Thus, one morning a week each child has an opportunity to see familiar teachers and children and practice reading and writing in his or her own neighborhood. No enrollment is required--kids just show up. (Bilingual students show up most often.) Afternoons, seven teachers stay and plan for the next year.

Encouraging Diverse Instructional Approaches

Innovation is not new at Alki. In some ways Alki was equipped for the campaign to implement the early childhood model before it officially began. A few teachers had already introduced new instructional approaches in line with the model. In fact, a few were so eager to adopt certain whole language practices that Pat cautioned them to slow down a bit. Since the high mobility rate causes many Alki students to transfer to schools where basals and standardized tests are emphasized, she wanted to be open to a wide variety of innovations and make sure that the new approaches enabled students to succeed in traditional activities as well as innovative ones.

Progress feels nonthreatening at Alki because innovations are allowed to take many forms and paces. Some examples are described below.

Mrs. Marr's Kindergarten

The kindergartners in Mrs. Marr's room came from a variety of ethnic groups and had diverse academic backgrounds. One older child who was learning English as a second language was included for part of the day because the class was working at his level of English competence. The volume of productive noise in the room varied greatly, a barometer of changes in activities.

In one period, noisy groups of three were scattered on the carpet and among the desks, practicing reading. Each group was assigned a different book which the whole class had studied earlier. When the practice was over, they all returned to their desks and listened to one group at a time read (or sing) its book in unison. Before the group started to read, one member would ask those in the audience who were not paying attention to do so. The first groups stumbled a few times, but the teacher never intervened. She praised them briefly when they were finished. The last group, two boys who had just lost one of their members (when an aide had pulled him out for special help) looked at a loss. After a long, awkward pause the two boys plunged into their performance, singing with gusto to the end of the little book.

Another period was characterized by quiet conversations at six learning centers. Groups cooked mini-pizzas with a grandmother volunteer; used chalk to color one of four assigned themes with an aide; played board games with a mother volunteer; wrote a book with another mother volunteer; listened to a tape, after collectively choosing it without adult supervision; and estimated numbers, supposedly with the teacher--but the kids figured out what to do before she got there, so she just watched.

Mrs. Marr attributed the smooth operation of the learning centers to planning. She had taught students how to proceed independently and assigned them to activities according to a rotation system. Partly because the planning took extra time and money for materials (about $80 a year), she limited the centers to two afternoons a week.

In another period the class could have heard a pin drop as they sat in straight rows to follow the teacher's direct instruction in penmanship. Calling their attention to the "headline, beltline, and footline," she meticulously printed on the board, "Honesty is the best policy."

On Tuesday mornings the room was a-buzz with "buddy reading." The kindergartners paired up with 4th and 5th graders who listened to them read.

Mrs. Freeman's Second/Third Grade Class

Reading for pleasure seemed to be the key to enlightenment in this classroom. Mrs. Freeman started one morning by telling her class that she reads the newspaper two times everyday. On this day an article about television ratings had caught her attention, so she asked students their favorite shows and discussed how such data would differ if it were collected in different grades. Together they generated the idea of polling the student body to determine Alki's top ten programs. This discussion of statistical research methods occurred even before they had undertaken the customary opening activities--class roll and the Math Their Way calendar.

Next Mrs. Freeman read aloud <u>The Indian in the Cupboard</u>. (She prefers to schedule oral reading after lunch, but the complex Block schedule limits her choices). The 21 days left in the school year, she complained, gave her too little time to read the three

great books she had wanted to share. So she promised to give the students a list of titles to take home for summer reading. Several looked relieved that at least they had escaped missing the stories altogether.

The homeroom session ended when a Block teacher arrived to escort about a third of the class to another room, leaving 16 students for language Block with Mrs. Freeman. One boy who had been reading another novel in the Indian in the Cupboard series wanted to know what "epilogue" means, leading to a discussion of the relationships among events in the series (the epilogue of one becoming the plot of the next). The teacher concluded this discussion in order to direct a vocabulary lesson, addressing the phonics and meanings of words from a basal story. Then she turned to a list of words with the prefix "dis," going over its meaning in each case.

The environment Mrs. Freeman had crafted to enhance appreciation of literature along with skillswork seemed to have paid off for diverse individuals. Shining examples were three girls who had recently immigrated from Asia. Painfully aware that they were "behind" other children their age, they had worked extra hard and, consequently, advanced unusually far during the course of the year.

Mrs. Tompkinson's First Grade Class

"A mysterious stranger left a sack at your door. What might be inside?" was Mrs. Tompkinson's prompt for journal entries one day. Journal writing was typical for literacy activities in this room in that it was designed to invite children to perform familiar tasks while extending their skills to a new comfort level. Before the writers took up their pencils Mrs. Tompkinson guided them to probe the meaning of "mysterious" in a way that built on their knowledge of mystery and awareness of connotation in language. When they delved into writing, one boy had the privilege of circulating the room with an old-fashioned library stamp to mark the date on each child's paper, rendering daily progress official.

In another instance of extending children's capabilities, Mrs. Tompkinson previewed a tale about a trip by hot air balloon. She encouraged them to imagine the trip and ask good questions for learning about it. One girl, swept away by the image, wondered, "Are we going up in a hot air balloon for real?"

Another day they worked on "signature reading." Every adult in the building--custodian, visitor, cook, principal, etc.,--was eligible to participate by listening to a first grader read a story and signing the child's sheet confirming the act.

Mrs. Cook's Second/Third Grade Class

"I like child-generated themes," declared Kaylie Cook. "Pre-set themes ignore children's sparks of interest." In November, when Native American myths (explicitly related to U.S. culture) set off such a spark, she fanned it by using mythology as the guiding light for an integrated curriculum. The class continued to follow it all year.

The theme generated countless explorations. In one, student clans wrote descriptions of their mythical clan ancestors. One day the recess bell caught a clan dictating a passage to the teacher, who pecked it out on an old typewriter. "Wait, I want to finish this sentence!" she exclaimed. "How should I spell 'nerd'?" They stayed and spelled 'nerd' for her but could not finish the sentence because a heated discussion developed

around the proper place for the monstrous ancestor to live. Mrs. Cook entered into it as an equal, suggesting that her own house near the school would be a fitting ancestral dwelling.

As did many North American Indians, these students had individual totem animals in addition to clan ancestors. They wrote about these individually. Then they gathered on the rug and old couches facing a stool where one person at a time read his or her totem description. Since totems are real species, the material was scientific. One boy commented on the variety of usages students had for "habitat" and "environment." To examine the concepts, Mrs. Cook quizzed them about their science teacher's use of these terms.

In the background of this and all other assignments that day was a volunteer working with a few students at a time to create beautiful, multi-colored sandpaintings. (She colored the sand at home, a demanding project in itself.) During one break a cluster of kids gathered around her. One: "How do you do such cool art?" Her answer: "Everyone is good at something. I'm not much at sports, music, even academics, but I sure can do art."

In her language Block, all Mrs. Cook's students were from her homeroom. A few bilingual homeroom students who needed extra help left for another Block, but some bilingual kids stayed. Several "behavior problems" were assigned to the class. She had her Block students read novels as one group (both grades together) unless, for variety, they felt like splitting into two groups (not based on grade level).

The Dragon Tamed

Alki school climate has been harnessed to serve literacy reform. Whereas a few years ago staff were "barely talking to each other," now, in the words of a new member, they are "a highly integrated faculty with no resistance to change." A long-time Alki teacher notices that group awareness and cooperation are continuing to grow. Parent participation is higher now: The site management team includes parents, and the PTA has branched out from fund-raising to academic and social involvement. The spirit of goodwill radiated in a meeting Ms. Sander called to recruit parents for the Accelerated Schools Project. A number were concerned about the lack of participation by families of bilingual children. They immediately signed up to join a faculty/parent cadre to look into this situation.

Part and parcel of the "climatic" change among adults has been improved student outcomes, some measurable (like skills which show up in test scores) and some observable in other ways (like improvements in self-esteem, sociability, and sound thinking). Seattle's Academic Effectiveness Index, which compares schools on the basis of their California Achievement Test scores (absolute level and amount of improvement) revealed that Alki's comprehensive reading scores were two and one-half standard deviations above the district average. Scores in other skills were high, too. Indeed, Pat Sander reports that students pass out of special and into regular classes at such a rate that she has only the minimum number required to hire Chapter 1 and bilingual staff. Success is social, too. On the playground children form more integrated groups than they used to. Teachers ascribe this to the mixing of many "types" in homerooms.

In spite of its success in turning around school climate, Alki remains a complex urban school with all the obstacles (and resources) of any diverse population in a public

education system. Although a sound process for literacy improvement has been established, grave and pressing literacy concerns (the same ones many other successful schools are still grappling with) persist. Consensus is lacking as to the degree to which students should be tracked on the basis of their academic achievement level. Especially for students in special education, optimal criteria for class assignment have not been discovered. Assessment procedures are imperfect and the route to advancement in this area is unfamiliar to the teachers. Teachers need more time to collaborate. Split-grade teaching assignments complicate cooperative work among teachers of the same grade. (Several teachers place time to observe each other working with students high on their list of needs.)

Even if Alki staff prevail over these remaining challenges and created an ideal literacy program *in their building*, the difficulties many of their students face *outside school* may prevent teachers from realizing their dreams for each child. One teacher used to try to bridge the gap between school and family by driving to some of the farther flung homes for visits. An incident with a vicious dog led her to realize that she gets higher pay-off for investing her energy in class preparation and students at school. Communication, then, does not reach beyond the classroom the way some teachers believe it should.

Despite these remaining obstacles, Alki, in creating a process for change, triumphed over the negative school climate which was threatening education there, transforming it into a positive atmosphere for change. Controlling the school climate empowered the teachers to inaugurate a broad new style of literacy instruction encompassing many innovations as well as tried-and-true practices. Student academic progress and enjoyment attest to their success.

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TRANSFORMATION ON THE TUNDRA: A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL-WIDE LITERACY CHANGE

by R.G. (Jerry) Schwab

In a scene familiar to most of us, Joel Bachelder's second grade class walks out the back door of the school into the late May afternoon. The school year is drawing to a close, and the sun is peeking out from behind the clouds. Like school children anywhere, these children are excited at the prospect of a field trip and they have been looking forward to this excursion for weeks. Now, armed with plastic sacks and boundless enthusiasm, they leave the building in search of native plants and berries. Here the scene diverges from what many of us remember of the final warm days of the school year. The weather on this day is barely above freezing and there are occasional snow flurries. As the children walk along the road garbed in heavy boots, hats, and thick parkas they are five short blocks from the Bering Sea, and the teacher points out the receding icebergs, now only fleeting reminders of the frozen sea of only four days earlier.

Less than a block from the school the children scamper off the gravel roadway and onto the tundra in search of plants. The snow and ice are receding and last summer's delicate blue and black berries, fast frozen through the long dark winter have been revived by the previous day's sun and are prize specimens for collection. Linda Gologergen, one of the school's three bilingual teachers, leads the discussion when half an hour later the students return to their classroom to draw, count and write about the plants they have collected. As part of the week's bilingual theme "Berries" the children will touch on both Eskimo and European insights into the environment, social organization, ecology, history and technologies for preserving the fruit.

This case study portrays the radical transformation of Nome Elementary School as the faculty worked to restructure early primary education. The focus in the study is on the implementation of new approaches to early literacy. As will be seen, a project which emerged out of the desire to improve the reading of middle and lower ability students now touches every person and program in the school with implications for every member of the community.

Nome

Nome is unique. A small town of roughly 5,000 people, it is a place of extremes. Geographically, it is extremely remote, less than 100 miles south of the Arctic Circle and closer to Siberia (130 miles) than to Anchorage (529 miles). To the south edge of the town is the Bering sea. Only three roads leave the town, extending through the tundra roughly west, north and east, each ending less than 90 miles from Nome. Because of the extreme weather, these roads are closed during much of the year. In this land of the legendary midnight sun, the short summer brings lengthy days and practically nonexistent "nights." Freed from the long dark winter, by early May

Nomeites may be seen on the streets during the early hours of the morning going about their work and play.

The nonnative population of Nome exploded after gold was discovered in the area in 1899, reaching 20,000 people by 1900. Though the rush was short-lived and the population ultimately dwindled to the present-day level of roughly 5,000, the Seward Peninsula provided fabulous fortunes to many of those who braved the isolation and harsh conditions. By 1911 the region had yielded over $60,000,000 in gold. During and after the gold rush Nome became an economic and educational hub for the region, providing services and transport to a handful of smaller settlements and remote villages where native communities still subsist on traditional foods.

A glance at a list of Nome clubs and organizations gives some sense of the setting. Included among the 38 listings are the American Legion Post #19, the Bering Straits Native Corporation, the Kawerak Reindeer Herders Association, the Nome Association for American & Soviet Exchanges, the Nome Kennel Club and the Nome Volunteer Fire Department. A walk through downtown Nome reveals a roughly equal number of gift shops (9), saloons (8) and churches (11). Sled dog compounds are located throughout the town and snowmobiles are nearly as common as cars. The Iditarod trail ends in Nome, marking the finish of the 1049 mile sled dog race which begins in Anchorage every March. The Iditarod at once symbolizes and romanticizes the rugged spirit and history of the area. Though cable television now brings the world to Nome, the early morning program on the local radio station reflects the tone and texture of local daily life: announcements of community events in English, Russian and Yu'pik (the breakup of the icepack only days before brought reminders of the upcoming Memorial Day Polar Bear Swim in the Bering Sea where "submersion of the entire body entitles the swimmer to a commemorative certificate"), morning prayers, popular music, brief newscasts, and local commercials.

The population of Nome is roughly 60% Alaskan native (Siberian Yu'pik, Western Yu'pik and Inupiaq speakers) and 40% nonnative, resulting in a rich cultural mix. Cultural diversity, combined with the unique and romantic history, extreme isolation and harsh winters combine to produce what one resident described as an ethos of "stubbornness, independence, and a sense of hearty self-reliance." However, as in many modern-day frontier towns, many long-term residents view Nomeites as belonging to one of two camps: those who are transient, drawn to the town for a brief adventure or for a high-paying job and remain in the community for only a few years, often spending their summers outside the community (frequently in the "lower 48"), and those who are committed to the community, who grew up in or returned to Nome and who are actively involved in building a life in the community. Many of the "transients" see the long-term residents as parochial, small-minded and backward.

The tension between long-term and transient residents is apparent at every level of the community and has shaped the history of not just the community but the school district as well. Though the district is comprised of only Nome Elementary (about 460 students) and Nome-Beltz Jr./Sr. High (about 290 students), the turnover among administrators is extremely high. During the previous four years, for example, the district has seen four superintendents, two assistant superintendents, three high school principals, three high school vice-principals, and three directors of special education.

In addition, an extremely high number of children in the district are considered at-risk--as high as 70%, according to some. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects are realities within the community though the proportion of students affected is difficult to assess. Though the teachers in Nome tend to accentuate the positive gains made in

student performance, the increased involvement of parents and the generally happy, well-adjusted children in their classrooms, many acknowledge that their community has not escaped the specter of domestic violence and abuse. Nome is a microcosm of many of the same political, cultural, economic and historical tensions and conflicts which characterize large cities. In the words of Bob Walsh, head of the Nome Board of Education, "Nome is in many ways a fractured community."

Nome Elementary School

In another corner of the school, two enthusiastic third graders measure berries and sugar and pour them into a large bucket. Across the table two boys work diligently, grating reindeer fat. With the proper amount of seal oil and some furious stirring, the Akutaq (Eskimo "ice cream") will be ready to eat. Part of Young Authors' Day, ice cream making is just one of more than a dozen activities organized in celebration of the publication of stacks of books written and illustrated by children in every grade level over the course of the school year.

Until the late 1980s Nome Elementary School was a very traditional school. Most students worked from workbooks, learned to read with basals and focused on spelling, sheets of arithmetic problems and the like. The 400+ students were seated in rows and instruction was by all accounts difficult. Housed in a cavernous old building which looked like a cross between an inner city school and a crumbling warehouse, the students and faculty spent nearly as much energy attempting to avoid drafts and leaks as on instruction.

When in 1987 Dave Newton, the latest in a string of principals, arrived to head the school, few sensed the enormous changes which were about to take place. Many of the faculty describe the time before Dave's arrival as one in which teachers felt isolated from one another and relationships with both the building and district administrators were adversarial at best. The doors to classrooms were closed and many of the teachers were uneasy and on edge.

Dave's arrival signaled a change in the tone of the school. Where the previous administrator had been more traditional, focusing on running the school and leaving teachers to run their own classrooms, Dave spent much of his first year in their classrooms. The presence of the principal in the classroom had been a rare and uncomfortable occurrence in Nome elementary up to that time and it took months for teachers to adjust to this new approach. At first the faculty was unsettled by Dave's frequent visits and suspicious of the increased "observation," but after a few months perceptions among them began to shift. According to one teacher, there was a dawning realization that, contrary to expectation, the principal could be a competent teacher with insights and nonthreatening advice on instruction.

There was at that time some unease among many of the faculty about reading scores. Both standardized test scores and the perceptions of teachers indicated that reading levels were lower than they should have been. With Dave leading the process, Nome faculty undertook their own assessment of student achievement levels in reading, focusing on both performance and attitude. When individual and quartile scores were examined it appeared that approximately one third of the students were lagging behind in reading. Equally disturbing, the scores formed a skewed U-shaped curve with more students in the bottom and top than in the middle; the $200,000 the district was spending on remediation appeared to be having little or no effect.

In October of 1988 Dave Newton happened to be in the State Superintendent's office in Juneau and had a conversation with Mary Asper, the State Early Childhood Education Specialist, about a series of pilot projects she hoped to launch. The Alaska Department of Education was looking for three schools committed to restructuring their early elementary program to reflect current thinking in the field of early childhood education. Recalling that conversation Newton joked, " the first thing I thought was 'free money'! Free money always attracts me even if it's a lousy project." But the project was far from lousy; Mary Asper's vision fit with Dave's.

Newton was excited by this discussion and he took the idea back to his staff, where it met with both interest and skepticism. A few believed it was another fad, far too great a departure from what many teachers were comfortable with. Others were immediately positive and saw the project as a path toward implementing more innovative and progressive practices in their classrooms. These teachers had been quietly plotting their own escape from workbooks and seatwork. They had been developing integrated curricula and student-generated materials, were seeing more excitement among their students, and were themselves having more fun. The workbooks, said one of these teachers, set up many children for failure and others for boredom.

In March of 1989 Mary Asper visited Nome for preliminary discussions on the possibility of Nome's participation in the project. With the permission of the Nome school board, Newton sent a kindergarten and a first grade teacher to the state Early Childhood Conference in Anchorage. These two teachers had the opportunity to meet with Mary Asper to discuss the pilot project. Two years later, one of these teachers joked that when she talked to Asper in Anchorage it was clear that, contrary to what Newton had told his teachers, Asper felt Newton had already committed Nome to the project. Nevertheless, these two teachers returned to Nome enthusiastic about the project.

In May, Asper returned to Nome for a two-day restructuring inservice with teachers from the kindergarten through second grade levels. The inservice focused on developmentally appropriate education. For many of these teachers this inservice was a critical event, confirming for some what they intuitively believed, validating what others were already attempting to do in their classrooms, and exposing others to a new and powerful model for addressing the needs of their students. As part of the inservice, a potluck and work session was organized to which Nome school board members were invited. In describing the rationale, Asper introduced some of the school board members to what were unfamiliar ideas if not radical departures: developmentally appropriate instruction, learning centers, cooperative learning, the writing process and the like.

While enthusiasm was high among the Nome faculty, Newton insisted that a restructuring such as the one being designed was only possible if all staff and the school board supported the changes. A few teachers were still hesitant but voted to make the change. As a team the Nome faculty committed to the change and agreed it would be undertaken slowly and carefully.

Reflecting on the potluck presentation, Bob Walsh, Head of the Nome school board remembered having some minor misgivings: Was this going to be one of those open classrooms with no structure and children running all directions? Such concerns quickly faded as the teachers carefully explained what they intended to do. According to Walsh there was never any question that the project would be given the green light by the school board; for years the Board had been painfully aware that what was currently in place was not working. The main concerns of the board hinged on

implementation and costs. A week later, on May 9th, 1989, the board approved participation in the pilot restructuring project and authorized the expenditure of funds for inservice and travel.

Over the summer of 1989 an eleven-person team from Nome traveled to Anchorage for a week-long training with the Alaska Department of Education. Included in this group were teachers from the K-3 grades, the principal, parents, tutors, and the district ESL teacher. The team received training in primary education and began to draft a set of project goals, objectives and activities for changing the course of early primary education in Nome. Later, back in Nome, the team participated in inservice training on establishing learning centers.

The Early Childhood Restructuring Project

A group of sixth grade students moves through the school with a video camera, creating an electronic pen pal letter for students in an elementary school in the "lower 48." As they tour one of the early primary "pods," their camera pans and captures images of pairs of first graders writing and illustrating stories on color computers, and second graders scurrying to count the number of pockets in their classroom as part of the day's math lesson. A six-foot seal skin kayak balances precariously on the counter between the grow lamp and its crop of spindly plants and dozens of colorful but crusty pots of poster paint. Later in the afternoon several of these sixth graders will return to the early primary pods in their roles as reading tutors for the younger children.

In the fall of 1989 teachers and students moved into the long-awaited new building. The light, open, multi-million dollar facility is a perfect environment for the restructured early childhood program. In the center of the building are the common areas including a spacious library, computer lab, cafeteria and gymnasium. To the outside of the building are clusters of classrooms organized in pods with shared resource areas. This arrangement allows the open access, opportunities for sharing and flexibility necessary for the new approaches. Describing the move to the bright spacious building and the implementation of the early childhood project, one teacher remarked: "The fall of that year was very significant to us. We were coming out of the dark and into the light both literally and figuratively."

Over the next two years the early primary faculty worked to re-tool themselves and restructure their programs to meet the goals of their project:

1. The Nome Elementary School staff will work in concert with staff members of the various preschool providers. Through this cooperation:

    - o The Nome Elementary School and preschool providers, through regular communications, will articulate the needs and expectations of their respective organizations.

    - o The Nome Elementary School staff and the preschool staffs will assist each other in providing training and support.

    - o The Nome Elementary School and preschool providers will share information on student skills and assessment outcomes.

2. Classroom instruction will reflect an educational process that is developmentally appropriate for all students.

3. Classroom and school environments will be designed to foster developmentally appropriate instruction and a desirable atmosphere for student learning and participation.

4. Primary grade-level curricula will be reviewed and revised, when necessary, to ensure that curricular objectives are specific, developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, integrated, and are being implemented within the classroom.

5. New curricula or existing curricula will be written or expanded and implemented to support instruction in areas not currently included in the curriculum guides.

6. School personnel will be child advocates and work closely with other agencies which have responsibilities to assist and protect elementary aged children.

7. Instruction will correlate with the cultures and life experiences of the children.

8. Nome Elementary School staff will work closely with parents and families. In this cooperative relationship between families and the school, parents will be encouraged to participate in an active and meaningful manner with the school.

9. Procedures will be established to allow for accurate assessment and monitoring of mastery of student skills and knowledge.

Implementing Change

It is 9:00 a.m. and Candy Peterson's eighteen kindergarten students are moving to various Literacy Centers. The children choose the center which interests them and sign themselves into one of eleven centers: composing, computer, games and puzzles, read-aloud, listening, quiet reading, book making, handwriting, illustrating, chalkboard, or rubber stamps. In contrast to traditional classrooms with neat rows and quiet students busily filling in worksheets, these children talk, laugh and teach one another; loud without being distracting, the classroom is alive with the constructive sounds of exuberant learning. Many of the children work independently while others work in pairs or groups. Candy, her classroom aide, and a high school student move among the children and assist with the various activities, making sure that students get group or one-on-one assistance as necessary. At 9:30 a.m. it is time for a snack and the children record their activity by coloring in a square (the day's color is red) on a record sheet with both the name and an accompanying drawing of the center.

The changes which ensued from the restructuring project were dramatic. Empowered by the process, faculty enthusiasm was high. Teachers were reading, sharing and demonstrating new approaches to instruction. Said a sixth grade teacher: "We as teachers were beginning to feel good about ourselves and each other. Many of us were feeling for the very first time control over our own destinies. We were being treated like professionals."

Though some of the early primary teachers had been moving in this direction for years, the early childhood project helped to guide instructional practice in the same direction, though not necessarily at the same pace or to the same degree: Rows of desks were replaced with tables; teacher-directed, skill-focused drills were displaced by child-centered need-based instruction; product-oriented paper and pencil workbook activities gave way to an emphasis on the learning process employing student generated

materials; various genres of literature emerged as the preferred mode for teaching and encouraging reading; writing became a broadly defined and far-reaching vehicle for expression rather than a byproduct or synonym for handwriting; cooperative learning, peer coaching and cooperative teaching brought fundamental change to the tone and rhythm of classrooms; and integrated curricula and thematic units began to dissolve many of the traditional boundaries between subjects.

The implementation of such sweeping changes was not easy for everyone. "I was hesitant," said one teacher. "I'm not the type of person who is quick to change unless I'm sure it is going to work. I knew that what I was doing in the past worked and I didn't know if the new approach would work. I guess I fought the changes. I was in turmoil. But ultimately I made the decision that I would MAKE it work. One day I took out all my desks and put in tables. I did my homework over the summer and talked to as many primary teachers as I could find and asked them how they ran their centers, how they ran their classrooms. I listened carefully to the suggestions made during inservice, and tried them and they worked!"

The process of change was also difficult for some of the upper level primary teachers who felt that an enormous amount of energy, resources and attention were being expended. Sensitive to these concerns, the early childhood team worked to share their knowledge and experience with upper level colleagues and maintain open invitations for the participation of faculty and staff throughout the school. The success of this approach can be measured by the fact that the upper level teachers voted to put up with larger class sizes and concentrate resources on the early primary grades. The rationale for this was that the upper level teachers would reap the benefits of this investment later on when the younger children reached the upper grades. "It's all about developmental appropriateness," said one teacher. "Individual teachers progress at their own rates, just like kids."

Still, not every anxiety has been allayed. Third grade teacher Mark Fuerstenau admitted he still has some concerns. Third grade for Nome students is described by Mark as "a transitional year" since children in fourth grade are confronted by more traditional large group activities. One of the challenges he faces is making sure the transition is smooth and that his students are prepared for the change. Still, the gains have outweighed the losses. "I had been a pretty traditional, straight-up, line 'em up and shoot 'em teacher," Mark said, " but I've changed the way I do things a lot and problems of motivation, discipline, and classroom control have decreased."

Inservice Training

Inservice training was critical to the success of the project and over the course of the first two years specialists and experts were brought regularly to the school. Among the most effective sessions were those focused on learning centers, developmentally appropriate instruction, culturally appropriate education, portfolio assessment, and primary science and literacy. In addition, because of the high expense of bringing inservice trainers to Nome, the faculty drew on local experts, in-house staff who could share their insights, skills and experiences with their colleagues. Included in such in-house in-services were trainings on cooperative learning, Math Their Way, and computers in the classroom. This served the dual purpose of distributing special knowledge more widely and promoting additional collaboration among staff.

In addition, the inservice was carefully targeted to the goals of the project and the specific needs of the faculty. For example, when Kristin Tornquist, the school's new

Chapter 1 teacher was working to move the Chapter 1 program away from traditional direct instruction with children pulled out of their regular classrooms, Dave Newton sent her to a direct instruction workshop. The purpose, said Kristin, was to enable her to see the approach from the other side and have a clear understanding if she ever needed to defend her rejection of direct instruction.

Parent and Family Involvement

Another important part of the team's vision was parent and family involvement. The issue was especially complex in Nome for a number of reasons. First, there are significant cultural differences in attitudes to child rearing. While nonnative parents are comfortable with the structure and discipline required in traditional schools, many native parents practice a parental style in which children are more autonomous. As one teacher remarked, "when the sun shines till midnight, children, like everyone else, want to stay outside and play. Many Eskimo parents see nothing wrong with that. But that's in direct conflict with our needs to have rested, attentive students in class."

Most of the teachers in the elementary school are white, middle-class individuals who obviously place great value on literacy and education. Many of the Eskimo parents, on the other hand, see formal education as less critical to their children's happiness and success as adults. Eskimo society, several teachers said, has no indigenous tradition of literacy; though some acknowledge the significance of reading and writing in "white society," it is not assumed to be essential. In addition, many Eskimo parents were forced through boarding schools where attempts were made to separate them from their own cultures, where they were shamed and degraded. These experiences manifest in many Eskimo parents feeling uncomfortable when visiting the school and interacting with teachers or the principal. For these parents "the school" is not associated with pleasant or constructive experiences.

The strategy adopted in Nome was to attempt to bring parents and family members into the school at every opportunity, to make them feel welcome, and to involve them at every turn in their children's educations. One of the key pieces of this strategy was the formation of the Parents For Kids (PFK) group. An alternative to the traditional Parent Teacher Association, the group began as an advisory committee exploring ways to get parental input and ultimately approval of the restructuring of the early primary grades. Eschewing traditional activities of parent teacher organizations such as fund raising, spelling bees and evening business meetings, the PFK group targets specific goals and activities. The PFK sees itself as an organization concerned with positive communication between home and school, it is not a forum for airing complaints or isolated problems. The mission of Parents for Kids, as portrayed in one of their newsletters, is to further positive communication between home and school:

- to promote good role models for children and parents.
- to encourage parents to come into the classrooms and take an active role in their children's education.
- to share ideas for hands-on learning activities that families can do at home with their children.
- to generate respect and support for our teachers.

One of the most powerful tools of the group is its monthly newsletter. These newsletters are brief, simple and address specific purposes. A typical newsletter might contain photographs of Nome students; a brief article on a school event liberally peppered with praise for the accomplishments of the students involved; a simple kid's recipe; "help wanted" ads from specific teachers for adults to read, be read to, demonstrate skills or otherwise participate in the classroom; a schedule of upcoming events; and projects (often a science experiment or demonstration) that parents can do at home with their children.

One of the PFK's current projects is the compilation of a "parent" (broadly defined to include grandparents, uncles, sisters, community members and the like) talent/resource database. Contained in this database will be the names of parents who are willing and able to work with kids in the classroom on reading/writing, give demonstrations, or act as volunteers and chaperones. Aware that some parents and family members are uneasy or self-conscious about their own literacy skills, PFK encourages individuals to come to school to share their skills in craftwork, story telling, and the like.

Bilingual Education

The high proportion of Eskimo children in the school creates a need for both bilingual education and culturally appropriate educational experiences. Though few of the Eskimo children speak any one of the region's three main Eskimo dialects (Western Yu'pik, Siberian Yu'pik, or Inupiaq) as their primary language, many of the children hear these languages among members of their families, and other aspects of native culture permeate their daily lives. In an attempt to provide both English language instruction and classroom experiences which relate to and nurture respect for the indigenous cultures of the region, Nome Elementary restructured and expanded their bilingual program.

In the past, bilingual teachers worked only with Eskimo children who needed assistance with the transition to the English language classroom. Later, bilingual teachers also visited the classroom for two half-hour sessions each week; typically, the regular classroom teacher took advantage of this "free time" to work on preparation outside the classroom. This resulted in a virtual "pull-out" for bilingual instruction. During the rest of the week the regular teacher tended to draw on culturally relevant examples to the degree he or she was capable or saw fit. One of the problems with this approach was that the bilingual material was presented in isolation from the rest of the week's instruction, and bilingual teachers were sometimes perceived as classroom aides who "did Eskimo culture" while the teacher attended to other tasks. Given only 30-minute blocks to present their materials, the bilingual teachers were frustrated that they were only able to do a cultural "traveling show," totally disconnected from the rest of the students' classroom experiences.

In 1990-91 a new bilingual program was put into place which attempted to address the frustrations and shortcomings of the previous approach. Students who need assistance with the transition to English continue to receive special instruction from bilingual teachers who speak their home language, and special care is taken with children who come to Nome from remote villages and need the support of adults who understand their initial fear and loneliness; the three bilingual teachers act as surrogate "Aunties" and "Uncles" for these children and spend extra time with them in a separate bilingual resource room. For the regular classroom a new approach was designed incorporating eighteen culturally relevant themes. A different theme is scheduled for each month over the course of a two-year cycle, with themes purposely designed to be broad enough to integrate other classroom activities. A bilingual instructor is assigned to four

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classroom instructors and spends a whole week with each teacher working with students on the theme for the month. Prior to the week in the classroom the two teachers work together to define specific objectives, align their respective program goals, and integrate the theme with writing, reading, math, science, and social studies. With the luxury of additional time in the classroom and opportunity for co-teaching, this new approach allows instruction which is level- and culture-appropriate and integrated with ongoing instruction. Equally important, Eskimo children are encouraged to draw on and share their own insights and experiences.

Special Needs

It was the overarching concern that many students' needs were not being met which sparked the restructuring of the early primary program, and the impact of the program on children with special needs has been dramatic. Encouraging children to write freely, to read literature which is interesting to them and relevant to the world they know, and to work at a pace and on materials which are appropriate for their own developmental level has opened doors for children who would otherwise be lost. "It's the best thing in the world for them," says first grade teacher Barb Kinneen. "When you give kids developmentally appropriate activities they are engaged and busy and when they are engaged they are growing."

Chapter 1 teacher Kristin Tornquist sees the value of the Chapter 1 program in the restructured early primary program as going beyond just getting kids to read. The program is becoming another avenue for helping children to develop at their own rate. "In the traditional approach, much of what I saw didn't jibe with what I know about language development," she says, reflecting on the changes she is attempting to bring to the Chapter 1 program.

Though some teachers are still adjusting to the idea of the Chapter 1 teacher serving kids in their home classrooms, and a few prefer traditional pull-out, increasing numbers see the value of classroom-based services. There are many benefits to this approach: Students who are sensitive to their "special" status are less prone to feeling singled out since they remain in their own classroom; children are natural helpers and special needs children reap the benefits of instructional assistance from their peers; because special needs students remain in the classroom and work there with their peers, other children benefit from their indirect and sometimes direct instructional interaction with Kristin; and the regular classroom teachers, no longer bound by large group instruction, see Kristin's presence as a benefit to them as well as the children.

Assessment

If there is a single issue on every faculty member's mind in Nome Elementary School, it is assessment. Teachers and administrators are feeling pressure to show that their students are "succeeding," but like many other reflective colleagues they are troubled by existing assessment tools and the assumptions which underpin them.

> "At the root of the assessment issue," says Dave Newton, "are two erroneous assumptions. First, that we are effectively assessing kids now--we're not! Second, that all children start equally and the degree of growth is due to the instruction which took place that year. In fact that's not true. This is not to say we shouldn't be assessing, we should, but let's not assume we have a baseline. We don't have the slightest

idea of how we were doing before! What we need is to develop an understanding of where children lie on a continuum. Assessment has to be quantitative as well as qualitative. We need information collected over time which gives us an overview of a child over time."

As teachers at Nome Elementary work through assessment issues they are focusing on the goal of mastery for their students, a skill or concept used consistently in realized products rather than abstract measures. As this process evolves, teachers are employing a range of assessment tools. Portfolio assessment is emerging as a key tool and home journals requiring parental guidance are being used effectively not only to involve parents in their children's education but also to provide concrete examples of progress. The response from parents has been extremely positive. The Preschool Progress Report is a new assessment tool designed for preliminary screening and information gathering from preschool and other childcare providers. Reflecting the school's commitment to community involvement, the tool was developed by a committee which included one kindergarten teacher, the special education teacher, the director of the Nome Head Start Program and the director of the local preschool. The tool is intended to assess a broad range of developmental skills and capabilities prior to the student's arrival in kindergarten. By assessing a student's abilities to, for example, problem solve, tell stories, take turns, recognize and write his or her own name, it is possible to identify students who are potentially at-risk and to test them further.

The Lessons Learned Along the Way

Dave Newton, principal of Nome Elementary School, is in his office meeting with a visitor from "the lower 48" when a kindergartner arrives at his door and announces: "I want to read you my story." For the next few minutes Dave gives his undivided attention to the young author who has now unselfconsciously moved onto Dave's knee. When the story has been completed Dave praises the boy and asks him to add his name to the authors' log, a long and ever-growing list of students who come to share their creations with their principal. Obviously pleased with themselves, the boy returns to his class and Dave to his visitor.

Change is always complex. Seldom smooth and gradual, it more often proceeds through a series of fits and starts. Under the best conditions change brings with it growth and renewal, but it is rarely accomplished without pain and some degree of panic. For many teachers in Nome the process of change has been an invigorating, exciting journey toward dreams once denied, but for a few it has been an exhausting trek tinged with uncertainty and loss. All agree, however, that the process has sharpened their focus and brought them together as a team; disagreements still exist but now the participants are willing to air them.

There are myriad lessons to be learned from the Nome experience and though some are context specific others are not. The following is a consolidation of some of the key ideas, strategies and insights which underpin the success of Nome Elementary's restructured early primary program; they are derived from the comments of the principal, teachers, aides, parents and community members who are working together to bring their vision to fruition for the benefit of their students and community. It is hoped that the lessons they learned will be useful for others attempting to implement dramatic changes to early literacy programs in other settings.

Why? (not just how!) It is extremely important that teachers understand the why and not just the how of changes they implement. The movement away from traditional

approaches to literacy is complex, and success depends as much on understanding the philosophical bases of the new approaches as the techniques. Inservice is a must in this regard as is familiarity with "the research." One of the roles of the principal is to be willing to engage staff in an ongoing dialogue, talking about the research without condemning people for not having the same views.

Critical mass. There is a threshold of "buy-in" which is necessary to make the innovations work. It is possible to progress and succeed when some are still skeptical, but if there are too many skeptics it won't work. A critical mass is necessary. Fears and misgivings need to be treated with respect, but enthusiasm must to be nurtured and risk-taking rewarded.

Mentoring. One of Nome's great successes was the way the restructuring allowed teachers to learn from each other. While there were always colleagues who shared, the early childhood program promoted an exchange of ideas and techniques among a much wider network of teachers. In addition, ongoing inservice programs brought outstanding early childhood teachers to Nome to help guide the program and assist teachers on a one-to-one basis.

Local experts. Teachers who have special skills or particular enthusiasms within curricular areas are critical resources for their colleagues. Thus, it may be a shrewd investment to develop curricular area specialists by supporting teachers who express interest in developing new skills. For example, one Nome teacher asked to attend training on Math Their Way. After the training that teacher has become a "local expert" and advises and coaches her peers as they implement the program.

Staff development. To implement widespread change it is necessary to get teachers and administrators thinking and working together. In most schools teachers have common interests but they need training to get on track. Staff development can't stop with occasional in-services, it needs to be ongoing.

Passion and a little patience. Real change was possible in Nome because the teachers and the principal are passionately committed to their craft and to the children of their school. Now, decisions always focus on the implications for the students. Change is difficult, however, and more difficult for some than others. Patience with those who are less sure about change is critical; the goal should be to help them see the need to change without ever making them feel they are failing.

Creative budgeting. Resources are always a problem, so it is important to take care with every dollar and make sure the line items reflect the program goals rather than having the program follow the line items. Using the budgeted dollars in creative ways can extend available resources. For example, the funds traditionally expended on workbooks for a single year are now being reallocated for manipulatives, Big Books, and literature. As a result, the school is quickly increasing its holdings of nonconsumable materials in a relatively short period of time.

Building trust. This is the administrator's job. The staff needs to feel the administrator cares about children, cares about teachers and is knowledgeable about instruction. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to take on high risk changes unless they have confidence in the principal. This trust must be concrete: When teachers are right, the principal needs to be there; when teachers are wrong, the principal needs to be there to help them be wrong in a graceful way. "How teachers view you is critical to success," says Dave Newton. "If they see you as a critic or adversary or anything less than a partner it won't work."

Celebrating success. Teachers who are achieving success need to be patted on the back, both by the principal and their peers. By fostering an atmosphere which focuses on the positive, it becomes easier for teachers to take risks. Nome staff meetings, for example, always included discussion of the wonderful things the faculty see happening in the school.

Changing the School to Fit the Children

The impetus for the restructuring of the early primary program was the desire to increase the reading levels of students who were not performing the level they were capable of. The goal was to serve all the students, not just those at the lower and upper ends of the continuum as is too often the case. Throughout the project the teachers have retained that vision and have met with great success. In the words of Candy Peterson, kindergarten teacher and faculty chair of the early childhood restructuring project, "we are changing the school to fit the children, instead of trying to fit the children to the school."

WEST ORIENT'S DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL-WIDE LITERACY CHANGE

by Sylvia Hart-Landsberg

The West Orient goal for literacy, as informally expressed by Principal Chuck Tomac, is "to stay consistent with the newer approaches to literacy instruction:"

> Our philosophy is to start with whole language before looking at individual skills, so that skills are understood within a meaningful piece of language. The focus is on the meaning base. Instead of published programs, the teachers use diverse literature for reading, workshops for writing, and intersperse listening and speaking throughout the curriculum.

This study describes the "drama" of establishing this goal and organizing the school to pursue it (as it had developed by the spring of 1991).

The Characters: West Orient School and Community

When Rose Green, educational assistant, needed to tell a visitor the population size of West Orient, the town which the school serves, she picked up the phone and asked for the superintendent by first name before she remembered his out-of-town plans for that day. Other personnel might have responded the same way. It's not surprising that the town's size is not common knowledge: With its widely dispersed population, it scarcely exists as an entity separate from the school. And familiar relations with the top administrator are normal in this tiny district characterized by a congenial faculty.

Ms. Green also represents the way the small community atmosphere is integrally related to the school literacy program, the subject of this case study. Her job includes coordinating computer instruction and supervising children in the computer lab. "It feels so good when kids get it!" she beams. "I love to see their expression and delight." For this and her other assignments she tries to learn the name of every child in the school--but calls them "Love" when she forgets their names. She has lived in the West Orient School District for 21 years and worked in the school for 11. Now and again when she's doing her grocery shopping an adult will accost her, "Hey, remember when you used to call me 'Love'?" (The mobility rate is low here--there are few apartment buildings, rentals, and new homes.)

Orient is a rural district with one school for grades K-3 and one for grades 4-8. West Orient Elementary is the primary school, with 275 students. There are three teachers at each grade level. Since the school is the community's focal institution, consolidation is a burning issue. The district's citizens and employees have struggled to remain independent from larger districts in spite of the low salaries, obligations to serve on many committees, and understaffing which are associated with its small size.

Like Ms. Green, school board members here know the community very well and are closely involved with the school literacy program. They represent a cross-section of the community--a blue collar supervisor, an attorney, a farmer, a post office supervisor, and a financial advisor. Several have children in the district schools. One became interested in school politics a few years ago as a result of her participation in the movement to improve literacy instruction. All take an active, positive stance toward the language innovations for which the school is well known in the region.

What is the client population of the school like? "Kids here," said one teacher, "aren't street-wise--they appreciate nature and are able to be children. I really like to use their parents in the classroom." Parents, according to another teacher, "are increasingly suburban rather than rural. There is a small core of undereducated farm people and an elite group of people from a costly development--about 50-50. And there are blue collar people who have saved money for good housing." The principal noted that "on California Achievement Test scores the school usually is well above the national mean." But the limits of family support for education became evident when the Reading Recovery teacher (whose work is described below) was able to depend on only two out of six families to help their children practice reading daily. In terms of ethnicity, most of the students are white. There are about 12 Hispanic-Americans and even fewer Asian- and African-Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Developing the Literacy Program

Setting Literacy in Center Stage

As some critics judge educational success, West Orient did not have a crisis or even a problem with their reading instruction four years ago when they began to rewrite their "script" for literacy education. Why, then, did they take on this challenge which so dramatically altered instruction and atmosphere in the school?

A school board member and Orient parent, Judy Head, recalled the community demand for change:

> As long as eight years ago (the early 1980s) the community was concerned about reading. Children were slipping and their needs were not being met. My son, in first grade then, was offended at the expectation that he should start reading in a book which was way too easy for him. Enthusiasm was stepped on. There were other dissatisfied parents of kids who had trouble reading. A group of parents came before the school board but found the administration unreceptive to their ideas. Parents who wanted to see alternatives came to a breakfast "brainstorming" meeting. They questioned isolated skills, workbook pages, and repetition and tossed in ideas like reading menus and doing math problems about subjects in literature. Then three new administrators arrived. They brought a sense of professionalism and respect for staff. The community felt their changes would be good and the staff felt ownership.

A kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Ogden, described the need for change:

> We were all looking for a better way because the children had only reading books to read. This was unsatisfactory because learning and curiosity were not satisfied by reading them only--it was so limited.

The principal, Chuck Tomac, in a grant application, detailed the "better way" they sought:

> To increase students' expressive and receptive literacy, extend teacher expertise in whole language instruction, develop assessment measures which parallel instruction, and establish a collaborative network for the site and area.

Developing the Action

The teachers and principal enacted the changes leading to and following from the decision to become a whole language school. The board and a few parents instigated some innovations and refused to "rubber stamp" others. These "actors"--teachers, principal, board members, and parents--are the "we" whose composite account of organizational and staff development makes up this section.

1985-1986. Without knowing it, we were "pre-organizing" for effective change before we adopted explicit reading goals. As part of the Onward to Excellence (O.T.E.) program, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's model for site-based school improvement, we developed a leadership team which later became the Site Committee for the literacy activities funded by Oregon's 2020 project (described below). Thus, before we adopted our reading goal we already had reaped wide success in reaching other improvement goals which included discipline and math. In terms of curriculum, our new kindergarten teacher was using Math Their Way and Success in Reading and Writing, both programs which encouraged us to expand our repertoire of literacy activities.

1986-1987. Several teachers developed a document on literacy research. It supported their desire to back out of ability grouping and vocabulary-controlled basals.

Three of our teachers took a course on Success in Reading and Writing and got the principal's okay to use it. They especially liked the independent reading section, but found that "something was missing." It left them with the need to work on direct teaching, questioning strategies, and conferencing. Although the program did support integration of the various content areas with literature, in the "sounds-in-context" section they felt they were "falling apart."

1987-1988. The next year we found the missing link when we invited an expert in whole language to teach us. With her guidance, one first, one second, and one third grade teacher who had taken a whole language course became leaders of their grades and took on the job of selecting and arranging materials. At that point our greatest need was money for books; the principal found some in the workbook fund. As the principal saw it, "One wants to buy a complete program. Many publishers put together packages. We brought in examples from seven or eight publishers, but no one's package was right for us." In the first year the grade leaders selected and taught with a core set of books for each grade, trying to design "teachable" material based on them. The challenge was to read the literature deeply and plan instruction which covered

particular skills, rather than picking an attractive book and devising "cute-sy" activities to go with it. At the end of the first year of training we ordered books for the next year. One mistake we see in hindsight was buying too many chapter books: About one per quarter is suitable for many classes.

Although the grade leaders supplied this list to others in their grade, each teacher could add his or her own titles. We were allowed to continue using workbooks, but only about half of us did so. The following year this was no longer an option. When the time to adopt basal reading texts came up, the district decided, on the basis of administrative and curriculum committee advice, not to order reading workbooks at all.

During this transitional year the principal conducted an unscientific study of outcomes of three instructional approaches, one in each of three heterogeneous third grade classes. One class used student-centered methods and a modified form of Success in Reading and Writing, another class switched to the same plan mid-year, and a third class used traditional basal materials. The results were that the traditional class had markedly lower scores on standardized tests than the student-centered class and slightly lower scores than the "half-and-half" class. This showed the staff and board that innovations in the direction of whole language *at least* didn't *hurt* test performance. More importantly, it signified that sound experimentation was "safe" in this school.

The districts paid teachers who were interested in researching emergent literacy to read for one hour a month and discuss their ideas for two hours a month. They met after school in the faculty room. In preparation, two teachers wrote an agenda (typed by the school secretary) and passed out a copy of a different reading to each participant. If one of us failed to read or report on a piece, the agenda revealed the gap, so we were encouraged to take the assignments seriously.

1988-1989. To facilitate the new practices with the newly chosen literature, we instituted grade-level planning meetings during school time. (Originally we had a substitute for half a day per year; this has been increased to one whole day each quarter.) This reduced work as well as isolation--people have became more willing to share their opinions.

The movement in the direction of whole language was occurring at all levels of our school system, but it did meet with some teacher resistance. This was based on a variety of beliefs: It was not really teaching, too unstructured, too costly, unsuitable for many students, and a disadvantage when used with the conventional assessment procedures already in place. One teacher felt that invented spelling and lack of small groups reading and discussing the same material were grave disadvantages, even though she liked the literature focus and thematic units. As an older teacher, she said that it was harder for her to make the switch than it was for younger professionals.

The school board formally adopted the whole language approach for both its schools and gave West Orient $20,000 to promote the change. At this juncture the principal asked us, "Can we agree to move together in this direction?" Although there may have been individuals with reservations, no one put a foot down and said "No." At this and other times faculty were invited to discuss openly their misgivings about the changes and the change process. One meeting was held for the explicit purpose of providing a forum for doubts about the changes.

The principal then directed us to work on four major components of the literacy program and provided a time-line for introducing them if we had not already done so. (See Figure 1.) Many of us already had extensive training and experience in Writer's

Workshop, so that was easy. Read Aloud was familiar too. Independent Reading also was easy to start. It was Group Experience that really stretched our capabilities at first. The teamwork at each grade level intensified as we looked at texts, other literature, and instructional activities with these components in mind.

1989-1990. West Orient received a grant from Oregon's School Improvement and Professional Development Program for "20/20 Money" to implement whole language instruction. It was at this time that the O.T.E. leadership team became the Site Committee for the 20/20 project focusing exclusively on literacy. Faculty formed three committees which continue to be essential to the evolution of the literacy program. They are:

- **the Whole Language Leadership Team** who plan and coordinate staff development and implementation of instructional activities.

- **the Evaluation Task-Force Professional Renewal Team** who research, develop, and coordinate evaluation measures to parallel instruction.

- **the Whole Language Discourse Group Leaders** who initiated the area-wide Whole Language Support Group which meets once a month. We felt this would be important to the literacy improvement plan because teachers elsewhere in the Northwest had found such groups (sometimes organized by an Education Service District) stimulating. About 15 people, with a core group of eight, show up each time. For the leaders, it is good to interact with others from other districts. To verbalize what we are doing helps us in our instruction. And we get feedback on our lesson ideas. We talk about group instruction, group experience, independent reading, and records of progress.

1990-1991. After hearing a presentation on Reading Recovery, the principal created a position combining "standard" Chapter 1 work with Reading Recovery. This is a program of early intervention for first and second graders with reading difficulties. It aims toward quick results by offering students one-on-one tutoring with a trained teacher and by keeping students in their regular classrooms as much as possible. In its first two years, the current second and third graders, ha[illegible] missed the chance for first and second grade intervention, do not receive any of its benefits. Some staff opposed phasing out the second and third graders in this way. They also were concerned about the cost of a Reading Recovery teacher who, by program design, teaches a relatively small number of students each day. They justified the cost by referring to the program's promise that effective early intervention would reduce the need for later special education. The teacher in this new position was training in Reading Recovery while she used it for the first year. She felt that it was helping students to improve their reading, but not enough for her to "exit" them from the program (which is expected to produce such "exits" in 16 to 18 weeks). This may have been due to the facts that it was her training year and that a number of the students had little of the parental help which is a crucial part of the program.

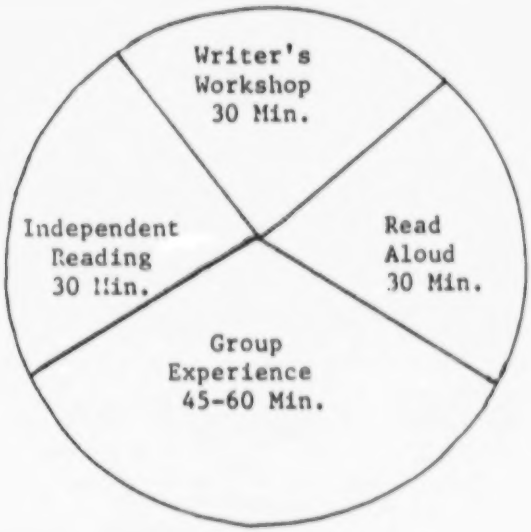
As the school changed, teachers came to fill increasingly professional demands. For example, the principal periodically assigned teachers to explain their literacy philosophy and innovations to the board. This usually flowed easily from a useful *spiel* the same person had recently given at a faculty meeting.

Key teachers with important strengths have come in the last years. They set a professional tone by example. Time for staff sharing has increased. Staff have not

always been interested in working together, but new members have caused this interest to grow. But hiring has not always been easy. For one position, the principal held eight interviews, mostly with applicants from the regional Whole Language Support Group led by two Orient teachers. Although each person interviewed was interested in *becoming* a whole language teacher, none was *developed* in that regard. Then he asked a local college for names of five promising candidates and hired one of them. The outcome, in the principal's words: "She's leaving for Paris after one year! It took many, many hours to hire her. It hurts to see her go, because she's great."

RECOMMENDED PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND BALANCE

A balanced whole-language program should include individual reading, writer's workshop, read aloud, and group experience. The following distribution of those components is recommended:



RECOMMENDED TRANSITION TIMELINE

TIMELINE	COMPONENT	IMPLEMENTATION STAGE
FIRST WEEKS	Read Aloud	Fully implemented
	Independent Reading	Introduce & develope
	Writer's Workshop	Begin, develop from where you are
END OF OCTOBER	Independent Reading	Fully implemented
FIRST OF NOVEMBER	Group Experience	Begin experimental transition
MID YEAR	Group Experience	Begin specific transition

Figure 2. The four major components of the literacy program and implementation timeline provided for staff by the principal.

Scenes of Children Learning Literacy: Instruction and Backstage Work

Choral Poetry Reading

In a crowded room the size of an office, the Chapter 1/Reading Recovery teacher, Sheila Shulleeta, announced to her Chapter 1 class of eight that it was time to stop reading their own books and read poems together. They all stored their work and took out poetry notebooks. In their eagerness a few pestered the teacher to let them be first to choose a poem. She calmed them down and asked a girl to make a choice. The girl chose "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" by Bill Martin, Jr. First they all read it aloud, following the words on the page with their fingers. Then half read while the others listened. The selections were compiled in red plastic loose-leaf notebooks which obviously had been thumbed through countless times, as the kids were now doing to find more of their favorites. Next, individuals chose some poems which, the teacher informed them, were old jump-rope chants. ("Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, Turn Around" was one.) They continued to read delightful, tongue-twisting pieces. The teacher: "Remember, it has to make sense, you guys!" and "Who wrote that one?" (At least one kid always knew the author right away; the others could read the name off the sheet.) They discussed the poems they liked and the ones they didn't, staying past the time to go to lunch. Finally Ms. Shulleeta shooed them out so she could prepare for the next group. As they went out the door several were chanting "I Have a Loose Tooth."

Two children stayed even longer to borrow Waldo books. One laughed, "Me and my mama are gonna go crazy!" (The next day, as the same girl was marching down the hall with the Waldo book under her arm, an adult asked her, "Did you find Waldo?" "Yes!" she beamed.)

Behind the scene of the choral poetry reading. The Chapter 1/Reading Recovery teacher has other Chapter 1 classes of about six students like the one enjoying poetry in the scene above. Her Reading Recovery work is quite different. It entails tutoring each of six students for half an hour each day. When a child can read at the average level of his or her classmates she "exits" the child from the program. She works closely with the special education teacher across the hall, both of them incorporating practices from whole language and Reading Recovery.

Kindergarten Morning

Math Their Way. *In one Kindergarten room--part of the converted basement also serving as the music room in this dilapidated building--the teacher, Alice Hatheway, opened instruction with Math Their Way. Gathered on the floor, the fifteen students identified the date--the 20th--and analyzed the number 20 by adding coins in various combinations to make 20 cents. These they displayed on the bulletin board in the pockets representing decimal columns.*

Singing. *Without being told to, the class turned to face the reading corner where Ms. Hatheway held up a nursery rhyme book illustrated by Tomie De Paola. After leading a few songs from it, the teacher asked a girl for a request. The girl wanted "Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater." "Do you remember if it's in the front or the back of the book?" the teacher asked the class. Since they didn't, she showed them how to find all the "p" poems in the index and turn to the given page. Later they wanted her to read "See a pin and pick it up," telling her to look it up in the "p" section. When that*

failed, Ms. Hatheway prompted, "Let's think of another name." Eventually they had her look under the letter "s" for "See."

Journals. *The students took booklets to tables. Each copied the date from the chalkboard onto a fresh page. From there on the content was the child's own. Although the teacher went from one student to another, commenting, she did not direct. Most drew pictures and labeled them, sometimes with the help of the circulating teacher. One girl explained, "You write so you can remember what you have done and when you are done you get to take it home." A laminated alphabet strip on each table modeled letter formation.*

Group reading. *The class gathered on the floor again for all to start a new "Big Book." They watched the teacher point to letters in the title, associate them with sounds, and explain the subject of this nonfiction book about beavers. They speculated about the book's content, based on their knowledge of beavers. Then Ms. Hatheway pointed to each word, guiding them to read along with her. The predictable pattern of the prose, in addition to meaning, phonics, the teacher's lead, the student chorus, and pictures, cued correct response. The teacher explicitly addressed phonics. For example, she had them analyze the blends "sl" and "sh" to sound out "slosh" and "slop." "Aren't these good words to represent mud sounds?" she asked.*

Beaver dams. *At the end of the session she invited them to contribute to tomorrow's project by bringing sticks and pebbles to build beaver dams. The next day pairs of students created dams from these natural objects with mud provided by the teacher.*

Behind the scene of the kindergarten morning. Ms. Hatheway is one of two kindergarten teachers (filling one and a half F.T.E.). Together they plan basic aspects of their programs, including spelling, writing, handwriting, phonics, and report cards. One has been at the school since the beginning of the literacy program renewal and played a leading role in it. She has compiled a notebook of activities which work well with the literature the school recently purchased for kindergartners. Both kindergarten teachers use it. (Each grade has a similar notebook.) The two teachers find certain equipment essential to sound kindergarten learning: *manipulatives* for whole language (such as a magnetic board and characters for retelling stories and clothes from Goodwill for dramatizing stories); a *photocopy machine which enlarges and reduces*; and a *laminator.*

Advanced Learners in the Hall

A kindergartner and two first graders sat at a table in the hall with no equipment except notebooks and pencils, seriously discussing the next stage they faced in the process of writing the stories they were working on and the main ideas of the pieces they were assigned to read.

Behind the scene of advanced learners in the hall. The girls in the hall had developed much higher reading and writing skills than their peers. Their classroom teachers, seeing the girls as a "natural" group, decided to make a place for them to work together. A spot where the hall broadens near the principal's office worked well because the principal as well as the teachers could drop by to monitor the girls' work.

Computer Class

A first grade teacher and her 26 students came to the door of the computer "room" (an end of the cafeteria converted for this function) and waited very quietly to be admitted. Rose Green, the educational assistant who runs the computer room, greeted them and told them that they were on "Circus Math" (for other classes it might have been Sticky Bear Reading, Word Zapper, Magic Slate, Inferential Annie, or another reading program) and should go to the same machines they used last time. Most kids were smiling as they held hands with their partners and headed straight to their places (two to a machine). Ms. Green never needed to help anyone operate a computer while she walked around and looked over kids' shoulders, commenting on the content of their work.

Behind the scene of the computer class. Ms. Green reviews new software being published and collects teachers' recommendations, then gets the principal's input on which to purchase. They need more time to research the software choices, the principal says, because they are trying to avoid programs which drill students in phonics rather than teaching "real literacy" (skills in the context of meaningful reading and writing activities). He finds that word processing programs, such as one used by the third graders, do this.

The computers used to be "scattered" in classrooms across the school. But under this arrangement, as one teacher put it, "The 'stuck' kids interrupted lessons and the 'helper' kids didn't do their assignments. Now they all do it together, still working in pairs." Each class works together on the same program for thirty-minute sessions. (The assistant's lab work cost the school its ability to assign an educational assistant to each teacher at the same time every day of the week.)

Ms. Green sets up the programs each day before school and during passing periods. Since these periods are only one minute long, sometimes her set-up work cuts into class time. Students waiting at the door get so impatient to use the computers that she finds it necessary to use stickers and compliments to encourage them to wait. For students who have made exceptional efforts on computer work all year she has the third graders make certificates.

Writers' Workshops

The many scenes of students writing at West Orient reveal writing as a major mode of learning in the school. In one first grade the teacher, Ms. Shephard, was at her desk conferring with one student at a time on their written work. The other students were working on one of two tasks--writing in journals they had constructed or illustrating stories they had written or dictated to an adult. The room was quite noisy with writers sounding out words and reading aloud to themselves passages they had already written.

In the second grade class of Mrs. Duchon children were working on a booklet of "My Life Story." They had started by taking home an assignment to get their parents' help naming a milestone they had passed each year of their lives. Now, for each milestone, they were creating a pop-up illustration and caption ("When I was one I learned how to walk," and so on). The educational assistant who runs the library and a volunteer parent were helping students spell and construct pop-ups.

In another second grade room Mr. Anderson has organized the students, equipment, and rules for business-like writing. During the Writers' Workshop period one morning

the students were editing reports they had written. The rule was that any student who "goofed off" lost the privilege of peer editing. On each desk was a list of the phases of the current work (checked off if the student had completed them)--"title, rough draft, revision, edit, final copy, published document." The chalkboard displayed a list of books published by each student. The special education teacher was in the room to help a "special" student perform the regular writing assignment in the regular setting. Inspecting a report a girl was holding in front of him, Mr. Anderson was wondering whether he should let her take it home as "finished." In writing the final copy, she had failed to make some of the corrections marked on the rough draft. He decided to call the omissions to her attention and let it go.

In the resource room one morning, while special education teacher Ms. Frazier reviewed a self-evaluation of writing progress with a student, a number of other students were writing stories in their notebooks. One boy crowed, "I ran into another story!" What delighted him was that he had been writing so fast and furiously that he had filled several pages up to the page where he had started another story earlier.

Teachers carefully linked instruction in speaking and listening to reading and writing. In Mrs. Davis' second grade class, for example, students took turns reading accounts of personal experiences to the class. Later they explained their drawings of their dream houses, inspired by the "The Big Orange Splot" by Manus Pinkwater. She prompted analysis by pointing out ways houses reveal their inhabitants' characters. Next, the kids wrote their explanations by their illustrations.

Behind the scenes of the writers' workshops. Anyone familiar with schools would not be surprised that course-work, experimentation, and intense debate were behind these writing scenes. The teacher who decided to let his student take home an imperfect copy, for example, had debated this practice with the principal. Each teacher determined his or her own materials and methods.

Listening and Speaking Assembly

With western Oregon humor, kindergartners started off the Listening and Speaking Assembly: "How do you know it's raining cats and dogs?" asked half the class. "You can see the poodles!" answered the other half. The performance consisted of each class reciting or singing (often in unison) or enacting a short piece, usually silly. Music instruction was incorporated. For example, the music teacher, Mr. McLeron, led a third grade class playing Orph instruments and instructed the audience in the role of tempo, asking them questions about what they were hearing.

The audience maintained good manners, following the teachers' explicit instructions on how to act in an assembly. When announcing acts, teachers modeled eye contact, clear diction, and expression.

The assembly was punctuated by praise, contests, and movement. For one contest, oral clues to the location of bear medallions had been read throughout the school during the preceding week, and the first child at each grade level to have found one was now rewarded for "active" listening. The audience participated again when the principal asked for a show of hands from those who had done the "Home Literacy Calendar" activities once, twice, three, and four times during the week. He gave them another chance over the coming week-end: "If you still do four this week you can bring your sheet back signed for another drawing for a t-shirt." The principal and many teachers

and students were wearing this t-shirt labelled "West Orient School--Literacy 2000." (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. West Orient T-Shirt Design

Behind the scene of the listening and speaking assembly. This assembly marked the last of four special weeks, each culminating in an assembly to honor its theme. The first week, in the fall, had been Bear Week; later in the year came Reading Week, then Writing Week. The teachers on the Literacy Task Force had planned them, and the teachers at each grade level had met to review their classroom curricula with an eye toward good dramatic material for the assemblies.

Backdrop to Instructional Scenes: Placement and Assessment

Student Placement

West Orient has single grade classes which are not assigned or divided into subgroups on the basis of ability (or other estimations of school aptitude or readiness). Teachers occasionally select students who lack specific skills for temporary groups within classes. They also create groups for cooperative learning, sometimes simply by reassigning seats. Both of these arrangements allow them to take into account different levels of achievement without institutionalizing them.

If a student's chronic lack of skill development demands more attention, the classroom teacher asks the special education teacher to test and help determine how best to serve the student. The special education teacher shares the whole language goals of her colleagues in regular classrooms. She has stopped teaching isolated skills and keeps as many students as possible in their regular classrooms (without changing their learning disabled status). This way, she believes, they learn better coping strategies and avoid the discontinuity and stigma often associated with "pull-outs." (In spite of fewer pull-outs, special education enrollment has increased, due to better identification methods.) When she does enroll students in her resource room, she has them attend during their classes' art, science, or recreational reading times (and works with classroom teachers to rotate the subjects missed) rather than group reading or writing time. This allows kids with reading difficulties an *extra* "dose" of literacy instruction. Whenever appropriate, she promotes their success among their regular classmates by using the extra "dose" to help them on the same task the regular class is doing.

How did the classroom, special education, and Chapter 1/Reading Recovery teachers find the time to consult with the other teachers? The special education teacher said, "Before and after school (if there's time). In the hall, whenever, where-ever. But notes in people's boxes don't work well. Some teachers stop by my room for a chat on a problem kid. We also plan in structured meetings--annual I.E.P. reviews, regular parent-teacher conferences, meetings called by parent request, and staffings."

Student Assessment

Student evaluation and assessment ran the gamut from informal observation of individuals in the learning context (aimed toward immediate adjustment of the environment to promote more learning) to formal standardized testing (for comparing across classes and schools). On the informal side, for example, the classroom teachers' training in whole language leads them to continually monitor students' responses to cueing systems and other behaviors. The special education teacher has her young authors use the Analytic Writing Scoring Booklet developed in the Beaverton schools.

On the formal side, second grade teachers do a miscue analysis (which they have designed based on the work of Kenneth Goodman and Yetta Goodman and classroom observation inventories) for a four-week period each spring. (Many whole language schools find this kind of analysis informative but, because it takes a lot of teacher time, do it only for students with reading difficulties.)

Regarding assessment, faculty are not satisfied with the *status quo*. For example, one faculty member claimed "In third grade, formal tests are out of hand!" Others concurred. Third graders take: the California Achievement Test "partly for political reasons" (because many people tend to prefer the kind of information it generates); Degrees of Reading Power (which some teachers like because of its content orientation) required by the county; a new writing assessment mandated by the state; and scheduled observations by classroom teachers during Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.) Week.

Stage-notes: Advice for Schools Developing Similar Programs

In this section we see teachers and others review their own actions organizing the literacy program at West Orient.

You have to have a critical mass of supporters on the staff to start organizational change. Involving them in leadership roles curtails the resistance of those staff who trust change only when it comes from the "bottom." From this point, an "us" mentality can develop as people are encouraged to bring problems out into the open and deal with them together.

Change needs to be gradual. Everyone agreed with this maxim, but not everyone had the same understanding of "gradual." On the school level they did all agree that "a principal can't just go into a school and say, 'I'm Mr. Whole Language and we're going to'...." Some teachers felt that "speed" [too fast] and "lack of choice" [mandated change] were the only problems with the implementation process. Others found security in the clearly written expectations for introduction of one component of the program at a time. (See Figure 2.) On the classroom level, some advise, "Jump in with both feet and start swimming--the kids you have <u>now</u> are important, so see it and

do it." Others prefer to commit to a certain new practice for a certain number of days per week.

Bring in information which gets teachers ready for change. A "transition speaker" who introduces the concept of whole language to the whole staff gets the ball rolling.

Create an atmosphere of safety for innovation so that people don't fear trying new things. Then acknowledge and reward their attempts.

The staff must carefully structure cooperative relations among their members. Across classes and grades West Orient teachers coordinated their staff development, program planning, and purchase and use of new materials. In doing so they did not rely simply on people's goodwill (although there was plenty of that), but tried to structure meetings and change processes in ways that would make them inclusive and affirming. Although "some people don't want to give up control of anything they do," most found it not only necessary but also rewarding to forge collective control of broad curricular decisions.

There has to be some consistency of overall approach within the building. For example, in the early stages of literacy, children need more instruction in all four cueing systems and phonics than they do as they advance through the grades. "If half the staff teach one way, half the other, the community is confused and rumors fly comparing teachers. The public needs to know your database."

Teachers have to be free to follow their own styles. Thus, a teacher may emphasize one cueing system over another, for example. Teachers also need to be allowed to recognize *limits* in their own teaching styles: One of the leading members of the staff admits that thematic units overwhelm her and for the time being emphasizes the writing process instead.

The staff must spread its intellectual nets wide. Money must be provided for course-work for some teachers. The courses they take should be diverse, and they need to share their knowledge with each other. Before adopting new ideas they need to look carefully at the research and compare it to their own philosophies.

Scheduled time to share ideas and plan curriculum and instruction with other teachers is essential. Increasing teacher collaboration spreads effective practices. An unexpected benefit is that common teaching practices reduce parental requests for certain teachers, decreasing demoralizing competition. Collaborative work adds a demand to teachers' already heavy workload, but one teacher claims, "Whole language doesn't take up *more* time, but it is a *different kind* of time."

A consultant must be someone who has done this before. Such a person is especially helpful during the first year.

Encourage visits to successful schools. People have to *see* that success is possible. Another function of a visit is to start people developing their own *collective* vision of an ideal system.

Throw out the old way of teaching without throwing out the old skills. As a school commits to whole language there can be a backlash against traditional concerns like phonics and spelling. These still need to be learned--but in better ways.

Don't over-worry about basals. It is not *necessary* to use a basal to assuage parents' misgivings or for your own security, but it is *okay* to do so.

Teachers should take the limelight. In leading a regional support group, speaking before the board, and teaching college classes on literacy education outside the building, they form stronger professional identities which pay off inside the building.

A community forum on literacy instruction increases support. Invite parents to a presentation by the principal and teachers about the school's literacy philosophy and practices and the positive role families can play in them. This event should be an addition to, not a replacement for, the traditional Back-to-School evening in which parents can see their children's rooms, teachers, and work.

The program needs continual revision. Whole language is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The school can always be run more smoothly or even change its direction. Individual teachers may have "gaps" to address. For example, one teacher says that she is still developing her teaching of the writing process. She wants to be able to better identify children's skills and learn precisely how they are acquired.

Script for Continuing the Program

Literacy education at West Orient is an enactment of the belief that in order to enable children to deepen and express their understanding teachers must be able to deepen and express their own understanding of how people learn. With this in mind, they do not consider their literacy program a permanent performance ready to be repeated next year. Their goals for the next year or so include the following developments:

- **Integration across the curriculum.** Having had a year to "refine their whole language approach," many of the staff are ready to work on "crossing the subjects," starting with a thematic unit in the fall.

- **More use of alternative assessment measures.** Teachers find the second grade miscue analysis exemplary and plan to extend its use to other grades.

- **Deeper understanding of the philosophy of whole language leading to improved practices.** The staff spans a range of stages of development, but all can learn more about children and their interaction with their surroundings from the continual feedback between reflection and action.

- **Strategy groups.** Based on teacher referrals, groups of four students with the same learning difficulties (for example, mastering one cueing system) will be formed. Since members will not necessarily be Chapter 1/Reading Recovery participants, labelling will be avoided. Precisely fitting learning goals to groups' needs may increase efficiency and cause groups to be short-lived.

- **Change of the assignment of the Chapter 1/Reading Recovery teacher.** She will spend half her time as child development specialist, enabling her to contact more families and individual children, a task the staff has found to be closely tied to improving literacy performance.

- **Parenting skills classes.** For some families child-rearing guidance could lead to enhanced participation in literacy education as well as other benefits.

- **Teacher assistance teams.** The special education teacher is considering plans for a system in which teachers may request her support for individual students who are not doing well. The two adults could plan together an appropriate program for the child.

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APPENDIX A

Research Methodology for Depiction Study

Data collected for this depiction of elementary literacy innovations and implementation strategies have come from a variety of sources. Early in the research, interviews were conducted with professionals representing school improvement organizations serving the five states and the various State Departments of Education to provide state and district-level overviews. The titles of those interviewed varied among states but included language arts, reading, and early childhood education specialists and consultants, curriculum and textbook coordinators, directors of accreditation departments, and professors of education. School district and education service district curriculum specialists proved to be especially valuable resources for local level overviews. Without exception, the individuals we spoke with in these early interviews were enthusiastic about alternative approaches and committed to their implementation within their own areas. During the same period members of the project team visited several schools in the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area to observe promising practices and to interview teachers and administrators.

These interviews and early field observations were instrumental in the formation of a set of interview questions for later depiction site interviews. In addition, lists of sites employing promising approaches were solicited during these early contacts.

Before beginning the depiction study we decided that, given its exploratory nature, it was not sensible to choose a sample of schools or precise number of schools to study. We also felt it would be inappropriate to carry out any kind of statistical survey. Our strategy was to allow local experts to direct us toward innovative programs and practitioners, and to let the number of innovations we discovered through our expanding networks drive the data collection process. Ultimately, we targeted a maximum of approximately 50 sites throughout the region--10 within each state--as a reasonable level of coverage for this depiction. As the project progresses, we will continue to add to this growing database of sites.

Interviews were conducted over the telephone with teachers and administrators representing the experience of 41 sites throughout the five states: 10 sites each in Oregon and Washington, 9 sites in Montana, and 6 sites in both Alaska and Idaho. Of these sites, 11 (roughly 25%) are rural; of these schools, 8 are very small rural schools. In addition, the majority of the sites had Chapter 1 programs, a characteristic which provides some gross indication of the incidence within those sites' attendance areas of low income levels. This characteristic is, of course, one factor which may be seen to be related to the incidence of at-risk students within a school or district. The sites contacted also comprise a diverse mix of ethnic and linguistic groups (from remote multigrade schools in Alaska where high proportions of students speak a language other than English, to schools in Montana where up to 50 percent of the students are Native American, and schools in Washington and Oregon with large percentages of Hispanic and Asian students with varying degrees of English fluency).

A set of open-ended interview questions was developed by project staff to ensure consistent coverage. All of the interviews for a particular state were conducted by a single interviewer, two staff assuming responsibility for two states each, a third for the

remaining state. Interviews typically lasted 45-60 minutes and were usually preceded by an earlier telephone call in which the project was described and an appointment made for conducting the extended interview. After gathering summary information on the specific programs and practices, the interviewer collected a brief demographic overview of the site. The remainder of the interview focused on implementation issues such as leadership, compatibility of approaches, staffing, resources, training and the like. (A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix B.)

Once the majority of the interviews were conducted, project staff identified a set of focus topics to use to distill further the contents of the raw interview notes. These topics highlighted specific types of information such as program goals, barriers and implementation strategies. In addition, a set of protocols was developed to ensure consistency in coding the interviews for analysis. Staff members then translated their original interviews into the framework provided by the focus topics. (A copy of the list of focus topics and protocols can be found in Appendix C.) Discussion of these topics comprises much of the substance of this report.

APPENDIX B

Equity in Early Literacy Depiction Study
Interview Questions

Name:
School:
Address:
Phone:
Date:
Interviewer:

Goal of the Project:

(draw on the project description)

It is my understanding that you (your school) have implemented a (nontraditional early literacy program? reading/writing program? etc.). This interview is part of the first stage of this project in our attempt to:

- o identify effective alternative program models and instructional approaches throughout the region so to
- o depict the range of those approaches, the implementation issues and strategies employed

Though we will conduct detailed case studies of some of the implementations in the next stage of the project, for the purposes of the regional depiction we will not identify the schools or programs.

1. The focus of our interest is on implementation issues and not the nuts and bolts of your program, but as background, could you very briefly describe the instructional program/approach?

2. What are the demographic and structural characteristics of your school?

   a. how many students?
      - ethnicity
      - Chapter 1
      - test scores
   b. how many teachers?
   c. configuration of classes?

3. What was the impetus for change?

4. What types of support, leadership (or resistance) were there for the new approach from the...?
   - state
   - district
   - building
   - staff
   - union
   - leadership issues

5. In what ways was the new approach compatible (or incompatible) with existing programs? Was it necessary to adapt them to one another?

6. What were some of the staffing pattern issues involved in implementing the approach?

7. What types of training and staff development were involved in implementing the program?

8. What were some of the resource issues involved in implementing the approach?
   - costs for materials
   - costs for equipment
   - facilities costs

9. In terms of your building's textbook policies, what were the issues which emerged while implementing the new approach?
   - district policies?
   - state policies?

10. How did the new approach fit with existing requirements?
   - federal
   - state
   - district
   - building

11. Were there implications for implementing this program in terms of meeting the needs of special needs populations?
   - ESL
   - at-risk
   - rural (if a rural school)

12. How is the new approach being evaluated/assessed?
   - What were the evaluation/assessment issues involved?
   - from students' point of view
   - from the teachers' point of view

13. In what ways were the perceptions and involvement of parents and the wider community tied to the successful implementation of the approach? In what ways were they an impediment?

If you have anything documented you can share with us about your program we would appreciate it...(not required, but helpful).

APPENDIX C

Equity in Early Literacy Depiction Study
Focus Topics and Protocols

1. What is the name, setting, size, and composition of the school?
   e.g., Anywhere Elementary, Anywhere NW, 300 students in K-5... (etc. re SES, rural/urban, ethnic groups represented...)

2. What is/are the goal(s) of the innovation?
   (what did the school and teachers hope to achieve?)
   e.g., to increase parent involvement among parents of first graders

3. What is/are the innovation(s)?
   (this refers to the approach, the "what" of the innovation)
   e.g., bring parents into the daily reading/writing activities of their children

4. What are the implementation strategies?
   (this refers to "how" they sought to put the innovation(s) into place)
   e.g., principal placed research papers on parent involvement in teachers' mailboxes

   one teacher attended training of trainers workshop on the Dr. Seuss method of parent involvement

   principal required teachers provide parent orientation nights

5. What are or have been the barriers to implementation?
   (what factors have slowed the implementation of the innovation(s)?)
   e.g., teachers working without contract and feeling overworked

6. What has facilitated the implementation?
   (what are the key factors which have allowed the implementation to progress?)
   e.g., district support in terms of release time for inservice

7. How is the innovation being evaluated and assessed?
   (how are they determining whether or not the innovation is successful?)
   e.g., starting with portfolio assessment but making transition from traditional model

APPENDIX D

Research Methodology for Case Studies

Site Selection

Staff selected the case study schools on the basis of telephone interviews which were the research base for the first document in this series, *Strategies for Improving School-wide Literacy Programs*. These site interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators who were recommended by practitioners as having substantially improved literacy instruction in their schools. Open-ended interviews (about 45-60 minutes long) informed us about 41 sites throughout the states of the region.

Criteria for selecting schools from these 41 were that, as a group, they should inform us about education for rural, town, and urban youth, as well as at-risk and minority children. They also needed to encompass a wide range of organizational and instructional innovations in line with the key principles of effective teaching outlined in the Introduction and to be in a relatively mature state of the process of implementing these innovations.

Research Activities

A team of three researchers collaborated on the research design for the studies in order to ensure consistent coverage. Two researchers studied two schools each; the third researcher studied one school.

Each researcher became as familiar as possible (given the time constraints of the project) with the ongoing activities and points of view of people in a variety of roles and sought conscious and unconscious patterns behind subjects' behavior and beliefs. The specific data collection activities were:

- **Preliminary phone interviews**. As mentioned above, the initial calls made for the depiction had familiarized us with each school's literacy program. We knew about their school organization and goals as well as some barriers and facilitators staff had encountered. After a site was selected for further study, the researcher assigned to it phoned the principal to learn more about the school with an eye toward making time spent in the field as productive as possible.

- **Site interviews**. Researchers spoke with teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, instructional aides, clerical staff, students, and people in other roles. Relatively formal interviews were held by appointment in a closed room, with only the interviewer and interviewee present, and lasted for more than an hour. Less formal interviews included spontaneous, short conversations with teachers between periods and an evening-long conversation with a principal in his home. Recording methods were hand-written notes (taken during and/or after the interview) and audio-tapes. A limitation of our methods was that

those people who were more positive about the changes may have been more apt to talk with us, thus biasing the data. If this limitation operated, it was diminished by our flexible approach to initiating interviews. We found that most individuals were eager to share their experiences; the few we approached who were not eager at first became so when we were willing to accommodate their schedules and conversation styles. This flexibility increased the number of people who could find time to talk with us.

- **Site observations**. Each of the site visits encompassed many observations of a wide variety of instructional events. Classes were the most common observation settings; others included assemblies, school arrival and departure periods, playground sessions, a fieldtrip, and a meeting for parents and staff. Again, some data collection occurred on a formal, pre-arranged basis and some did not. Researchers wrote notes before and after observations. It is possible that those teachers who allowed us to observe their classes (like those who granted us interviews) were unusually supportive of the changes. However, the wide array of instructional approaches--from relatively innovative to traditional--which we were welcomed to view leads us to believe that such selection, if present at all, did not strongly color our data.

- **Participation**. In some situations a researcher was able to deepen his or her understanding by engaging actively in the subjects' activities, e.g., role-playing in a parent-staff meeting, going on a fieldtrip, providing an extra "set of ears" to hear individuals read stories, editing rough drafts children brought to the observer, and giving advice on how to construct pop-up illustrations. (The fact that school people sometimes swept the observer into the interaction attests to its vitality.)

- **Document collection**. School professionals gave us copies of some records of their efforts. Grant applications, school-wide implementation schedules, and workshop outlines reveal school history. Assessment protocols, forms for report card and Individualized Education Programs, letters to parents, lesson plans, lists of books held in multiple copies, and many other kinds of documents contributed data on current teaching and school organization.

By these methods we were able to study the models for implementing new approaches to literacy instruction which Alki, Nome, and West Orient developed.